Approaches to the Medieval Self: Representations and Conceptualizations of the Self in the Textual and Material Culture of Western Scandinavia, c. 800-1500

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Stefka G. Eriksen, Karen Langsholt Holmqvist, Bjørn Bandlien

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Contents

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Approaches to the Self – From Modernity Back to Viking and Medieval Scandinavia

Abstract: In this article the editors of the book account for the book's main aims, namely to discuss various modes of studying and defining the self and to investigate the various processes and practices that selves in Viking and medieval Scandinavia engaged with. In the book, these two research questions are discussed based on various representations and conceptualizations of the self in textual, historical, art-historical, and archaeological sources from western Scandinavia. Thus, the book aims to contribute to (1) studies of the self in Viking and medieval Scandinavia; (2) studies of the medieval self in general; and (3) theoretical discussions on the interconnections between cognition, materiality of cultural expressions, discourses and practices. This introductory article accounts for the historiographies of these fields and the structure of the book.

Keywords: agency, blending theory, choosing / choice-making, cognitive theory, cultural theory, *homo economicus*, *homo sociologicus*, practice theory, rational choice theory, social theory, wayfinding

This book has two main aims. First, the book will discuss various modes of studying and defining the medieval self. This will encompass a wide range of source material from Scandinavia, *c*. 800–1500, such as archaeological, architectural and artistic, documentary and literary sources, and runic inscriptions. The second main aim of the book will be to discuss what processes and practices the self engaged with in this cultural context, by studying various textual and material representations and conceptualizations of the self.

The first question that probably occurs to most readers of this book is: What is the self? The book as a whole will not seek to give a unified answer to this question as it will not deploy a single theoretical and methodological approach. Rather, the individual articles will take on different approaches to the self, inspired by theories such as cultural theory, practice theory, or cognitive theory, or prioritizing close reading of the empirical material. The book does

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not seek to give a new definition of the self, but rather it aims to engage with the current discussions and investigate how the various definitions of and approaches to the self may complement each other. Based on interdisciplinary investigations and with such a theoretically varied starting point, our aim is to learn more about how our own scholarly mindsets and horizons condition what aspects of the medieval self are "visible" and "investigable" for us. Utilizing this insight, we aim to propose a more syncretic approach towards the medieval self, not in order to substitute excellent models already in existence, but to foreground the flexibility and the variance of the current theories, when these are seen in relationship to each other. The self and how it relates to its surrounding world and history has always been and will continue to be a main concern of humanities and social sciences. Focusing on the theoretical and methodological flexibility when approaching the medieval self has the potential to raise awareness of our own position and agency in various social spaces today.

The Modern Self

The book contributes to and, therefore, needs to be positioned within three fields of studies. The most immediately relevant field is studies of the self in the Viking and medieval periods in Scandinavia[1]; the second is studies of the medieval self in general; the last is theories of the self within the humanities and social sciences in general. This introduction will present the main trends in these fields, in order to anchor our own investigations, starting with the broadest contextualization for the project.

The definition of the self has been a major topic of discussion in many fields and is grounded in the main paradigm shifts in social and cultural theory. The historiography of these major paradigms has recently been reviewed elegantly by Andreas Reckwitz (2002a). The individual, or the self, plays a major (if not a main) role in all type of social theories. *Social theory* explains human action either as motivated by purpose, intention, and interest (for example, Rational Choice Theory, where the individual is seen as "*homo economicus*")[2]

1 While the medieval period in Europe is traditionally dated to *c.* 500–1500, in Scandinavia this period is divided into the Viking Age, *c.* 800–1000, and the Middle Ages, *c.* 1000–1500.

2 This is reflected in Scottish moral philosophy, since its emergence at the end of the eighteenth century (Reckwitz 2002a, 245).

or as motivated by collective norms and values (Norm-Oriented Theory, where the individual is seen as "*homo sociologicus*").[3]

These two models of explaining the world have been challenged by the interpretative or cultural turn of social theory, also referred to as *cultural theory*, which emphasizes the symbolic structure of knowledge. Action is, according to this theory, motivated by collective cognitive and symbolic structures where "shared knowledge" ascribes meaning to the world. Cultural theory is based on and includes structuralism and semiotics, phenomenology and hermeneutics. It may be divided into cultural mentalism, cultural textualism, and cultural intersubjectivism. These sub-theories explain the social and the shared, and the *locus* for the social, differently. Culturalist mentalism places the social in the mind, as the mind is the place for knowledge structures.[4] The social and the cognitive overlap in the mind, as they are pursued in the same place. Culturalist textualism locates the social outside the mind, i.e., in signs and symbols, in discourses and "texts."[5] Culturalist intersubjectivism locates the social in the interaction, in the language, in the speech act. The social happens when the minds interact with each other linguistically.[6]

Practice theory, or theory of social practices, is also a part of cultural theory, but it forms a conceptual alternative to the previous three (Schatzki 2001a). It does not place the social in the mind, nor in the "text," nor in the interaction, but in the practice.[7] Practice is defined as the whole of human action, the pattern that may be filled out by various individual acts. Practices are thus social, but they are carried out by individual bodies and minds. Even though it is deeply rooted in the work of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, practice theory presents a considerable shift in the perspectives on body, mind, things, knowledge, and discourse. Practices are seen as learned and routinized bodily performances which include both technical (any handicraft) and intellectual skills (talking, reading, writing) (Reckwitz 2002a, 251). Practices are also sets of mental activities – routinized ways of understanding the world, of knowing how to do something, of desiring something. The mental patterns are not part of the individual's interior

3 Reflected in the work of Durkheim and Parsons (Reckwitz 2002a, 245).

4 Reflected in the work of classical structuralists as Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss, among others (see Reckwitz 2002a, 247).

5 Reflected in the work of Clifford Geertz, Michele Foucault, Niklas Luhmann (see Reckwitz 2002a, 248–249).

6 See, for example, the work of Karl Popper and Jürgen Habermas (see Reckwitz 2002a, 249).

7 Practice theory is exemplified by the work of authors such as Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, the late Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour, Charles Taylor, and Theodore R. Schatzki (see Reckwitz 2002a).

subjectivity, but of the practice. A practice thus deletes the distinction between outside and inside, between body and mind (Reckwitz 2002a, 252). Carrying out a practice means also the utilization of certain things – things can enable or limit certain bodily and mental activities (Reckwitz 2002b). In practice theory, discourse and language do not have the same central position as in other cultural theories. A discourse is just one type of practice and language exists in its routinized use. Social practices are routines of knowing, doing, using things, of understanding, or interconnecting and these routines create social structure.

Most significant for us here is that according to practice theory, the various routines and practices are carried out by individuals, but the individual consists of numerous "agents" who carry out the individual practices (Reckwitz 2002a, 256). The individual then becomes the unique crossing point of different mental and bodily routines and practices.[8] This is radically different from how the individual, or the self, is seen by the other theoretical paradigms. In Marxist theory, for example, the individual is a product of the dynamics and conditioning factors of social class, social relations, or power (see, e.g., Taylor 1989). In their quest to balance structure and agency, many post-modernists prioritize the mess and tangle between agency and structure – the discourse itself – over individual agency. Discourse and language have also been prioritized over agency, with agency seen as a product of discourse. Some scholars have, however, argued for the compatibility and duality of the relationship between self and social structures, viewing the individual as a constant function of social life, not a remainder of it (see, e.g., Giddens 1984). Scholars have also discussed the availability of multiple selves, or roles, within one and the same individual, and the inner and social conflicts that may arise because of the availability of such multiple, and often conflicting, selves. Such observations have led to debates of the corelessness of the self, i.e., that the self is undefinable on its own, but is either imposed on us, or is borrowed, mirrored, or reflected. Practice theory promotes the core of the individual, even though, or maybe precisely because, it is the crossing point of many "agents" that carry out individual practices, which are representatives of learned and routinized, bodily and mental performances.

Practice theory is often vague, however, on the motivational premises for why the individual engages in the various practices, and not least for how the individual chooses between a variety of possible practices, especially if they are conflicting. In other words, how does an individual make choices? How may an individual's choice, and thereof, continuity or change in practice, be explained?

8 For a further discussion on the link between emotions and affects (the human mind), artifacts, and spaces, as primary characteristics of the social, see Reckwitz (2012).

According to social and cultural theory, the choices may be based on inner intentions, collective norms, a sense of stability and predictability, discourse, language, learned routines and practices. These are all highly relevant motivations, but they do not account for scenarios where the motivations are conflicting. A few attempts at explaining choices and change within practice theory are made in recent works, where scholars suggest various factors which may lead to change. Schatzki (2001b) points to what he terms teleoaffective structures, combining the agent's intentions and affects, as a factor in practices.[9] Reckwitz (2012, 255) discusses affects in combination with spaces in a recent article, and stresses the "destabilising and inventive potentials of affects and spaces".

The dynamics of an individual's choice, and thus continuity and change in a practice, is explained differently by *cognitive theory*. According to cognitive theory, the self is genuinely unstable and immensely flexible: because of our immense cognitive abilities, we humans have an endless array of possibilities of actions and choices every single time we need to choose to do something. The endlessness of our cognitive possibilities threatens our social existence, as a certain level of predictability is necessary in order to engage in a successful social interaction. From an evolutionary perspective, humans have solved this dilemma by creating social norms, unified by common origin- and identity-narratives, often expressed symbolically by visual and complex metaphorical expressions (Engel 2005). On a minor scale, every single choice an individual makes is, according to cognitive theory, an endlessly flexible process (Engel 2005). Choices are thus made not based on stable parameters but on conceptual blends, when the projections to the blend are highly selective and may include memories of previous selves, ideas of others, known narratives, and imaginations (Turner 2014, chapter 4, 65–106). Blending may include analogies, signifying continuity of the self, and disanalogies, signifying a change in the self. Blending, that is choosing, selves may thus be seen as wayfinders. In order for them to be successful in their social interactions, the wayfinding does not need to be entirely stable (as proposed by economic/social theory), but sufficiently predictable, which is a much more obtainable goal. This is precisely one of the main insights one may gain from the humanities: world literatures, art, religions, and philosophies, including medieval cultural expressions, may reveal the limitlessness of human flexibility and the huge potential for cultural variance.[10]

9 See also Caldwell (2012), who discusses the concepts agency and change, as defined by Schatzki (2001a).

10 This line of thought is further expanded and discussed by Eriksen and Turner in this volume.

As much as cognitive theory promotes cognitive flexibility, it does not neglect the fact that cognition is always social, it happens in a given environment, within a given body, with the help or obstructions of certain things. The way we think and the way we are happens in relation to other people, in social contexts and relationships.[11] The way we think is also conditioned by our gender, bodies, abilities, and disabilities. The places and environments we inhabit function as context for our cognitive processes and we use things and objects in order to materialize, manifest, and realize our thoughts in a physical, perceivable world. Cognition is thus not only always social, but it is situated, embodied, embedded, extended, and distributed (Giere and Moffatt 2003; Clark 2012; Clark and Chalmers 2010). It is easy to see that many of the parameters that cognitive theory emphasizes are also essential for practice theory, as well as for other social and culture theories, albeit in different ways. The parameters and variables for discussing the self emerge thus as the common denominators of the theories, while the causal relationship between them varies.

The Medieval Self

According to this brief state-of-the-art of studies of the self, the self hovers between practices, routines, and cultures, and its own flexible nature and limitless cognitive potential. These theoretical discussions have certainly influenced the study of the medieval self as well. According to one of the forefathers of the debate, Colin Morris (1972), the individual emerged first in the twelfth-century and the manifestations of this emergence are, among others, the opening up of new professional opportunities, the possibility of personal choice of pursuing those professions, expansion of education, rediscovery of the classical past through textual adaptation and translation, personal piety and private confession, introduction of the idea of self-examination throughout society, the appearance of new genres such as autobiography. Caroline Bynum (1984) proposes one main corrective to this hypothesis, which concerns the importance of the social space for the emergence of the individual. She shows how the Church and the Gregorian Reform was the main context for the individual's, or the self's (as she calls it), desire, choice, and agency to imitate, to conform, to belong. It was the Church which formalized in 1215 that each layperson had to confess to his and her parish priest at least once a year. By doing this the Church succeeded in producing individuals,

11 On the interface between concepts like "situated cognition" and social psychology, see Smith and Conrey (2012).

but mostly because that was in the institution's own interest when claiming its own power in a contest with the royal powers.[12]

In this discussion, we obtain a glimpse of the "*homo economicus*" motivated by his own purpose, the significance of the social context, the discourse, the norm, as well as the individual engaging in practices. Many other aspects of the self have been promoted as primary and defining in the debate as a whole. Sometimes scholars have foregrounded the inner self, exploring traces of inward reflection and spiritual exploration (Jaeger 1987; Stock 1995, 2017; Kramer 2015), the cognitive or intellectual self (de Libera 1991; Carruthers 1998; Jaeger 1987, 2002; Wei 2012, 8–47; Copeland 2001; Le Goff 1993), the creative self (Morris 1972; Minnis 1984; Copeland 1991; Dagenais 1994; Binski 2010; Sandler 2010), or the emotional self (Hanning 1977; Rosenwein 1998, 2006). Some scholars have placed primary emphasis on the social self, i.e., the self's participation in social communities (Perkinson 2009; Shaw 2005; Bynum 1984), while others have emphasized the specific role an individual could have in a community, i.e., a knight, an intellectual, a priest, a tradesman, etc. (Le Goff 1990, 1993; Gurevich 1995; Wei 2012; Jaeger 2002). Yet others have investigated medieval sources for what they tell us about the roles the self sought or had to perform in various contexts (Crane 2002; Belting 2011, 62–63). A main contention within medieval studies is thus that the complexity – not the reconciliation but the combination of paradoxes (for example, inner *and* social, religious *and* intellectual, rational *and* emotional) – is a prime feature of the medieval self, which needs to be studied within a specific temporal and socio-cultural context (Bynum 2011).

The material turn in many disciplines has also emphasized that medieval artifacts are cultural expressions, with the primary characteristic that they are artifacts made by and for people. This has made the link between medieval selves (who are forever gone) and the material culture (which is the only remnant left) much more explicit.[13] The material turn in the humanities also allows for new interdisciplinary and parallel approaches to studying the medieval self, based on manuscripts, art, architecture, with the aim of investigating the variety in the dynamics between the self and the materiality of cultural expressions.

Recently various scholars have added new, previously unconsidered factors to the discussion. David Gary Shaw (2013), for example, argues that the nature of the self's agency has not been taken in consideration enough. According to

12 A similar argument was also proposed more recently by Verderber (2013), see below.

13 On material philology, see Nichols 1990; on illuminated manuscripts and art, see Ladner 1965; Belting 2011; Smith 2012; Bynum 2011; on materiality in archaeology, see Olsen 1997, 2010, 2012.

him, the self's agency comes prior to expression, and therefore the self is accessible independent of texts, discourses, languages, and social structures. Shaw argues that the self is always social, but nevertheless has agency, which is primarily a cognitive change that depends on mental and bodily experience. Agency thus constitutes a narrative. Indeed, even if the self represents a type, if the self conforms, or is narrated as passive, the agency of the self remains primary. Shaw's ideas invite the recovery of the self, which is sorely needed after its deconstruction, and the present anthology responds to this challenge: the self is here given center-stage and is seen with all its complexities and in relation to multiple cognitive processes, social interactions, and discourses.

Suzanne Verderber (2013, 4–5) also foregrounds the self's agency, cognition, and self-reflection, even though her argument follows a different line of thought. She criticizes the presupposition that individualism is "the natural, universal, predetermined, and desirable model of subjectivity," the so-called "sleeping beauty effect."[14] Verderber points out the difficulties related to giving a concise and stable definition of the term "self" and "individual" in many scholars' work and wonders how, in so many studies, the individual ends up being seen in opposition to social forces (Verderber 2013, 6–8).[15] Her main argument is that the medieval self does not emerge necessarily as a consequence of the Gregorian Reform. What she calls subjective interiority rather enables the space to appear, as a result of the clash between secular and priestly power (Verderber 2013, 13). In such a situation of a conflict between various social spaces, an individual is bound to turn inwards and reflect upon the set of ideals promoted by the two "powers." In a space where the individual is made to choose, the need to choose demands of the self that it exist between the inside and several outsides. The main tool to navigate between these spheres is reflexivity and self-examination.

One aspect that is common for Shaw and Verderber is that, without explicit references to cognitive sciences, the self's agency, self-reflection, and cognition are emphasized, without neglecting the significance of the cultural and social context.

14 Her argument is inspired by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Lacan.

15 For a discussion on terms such as subject, individual, agent, actor, and with the greatest focus on subject and subjectivity, see Rebughini 2014.

Medieval Scandinavian Selves

The context that this anthology engages with most immediately is medieval Scandinavia. This is a vast and complex "context" or "entity" to work with, as during various historical periods it has included Denmark and Sweden, Norway and Iceland, parts of modern Scotland and the islands in the North Sea. In scholarship, focus often falls on parts of medieval Scandinavia. In philology and literary scholarship, there is often a schism between East Norse (Swedish) and West Norse philologies and literatures. Archaeologists often focus on peculiarities of specific sites and urban settlements. Art historians, similarly, give priority to the specific details of the architectural and visual heritage in specific areas. The main reason for this is, obviously, the vastness of an endeavor to cover a certain topic in the whole area. In this book, the main focus will fall on medieval western Scandinavia, namely Norway and Iceland, but a few of the articles investigate the self in medieval Sweden and Denmark, based on textual, archaeological, and art-historical material.

A historical fact which makes the study of the self in medieval Scandinavia especially interesting is that the area became Christian much later than most parts of Europe. Denmark was Christianized by Haraldr blátǫnn in 975, as mentioned on the Jelling Stone. Norway and Iceland became Christian around the year 1000, albeit under different circumstances. The realms of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden established their own bishoprics in 1104, 1152–53, and 1164, respectively. So, while the individual and the self were perhaps emerging in continental Europe during the twelfth century under the influence of the Gregorian Reform or on account of the clash of secular and priestly powers, the Scandinavian context offers a different political, social, and religious space. The main *raison d'être* of the book is to discuss what processes and practices the self engaged in in this context.

Because of the book's focus, a short review of current studies of the self in medieval Norway and Iceland is most relevant. Unsurprisingly, the main scholarly paradigms, as described above, are traceable in this field as well, even though maybe not all aspects of the theories are adequately discussed. Historians have addressed such topics as general notions of the individual, individuality, and kingship (Bagge 1998a; Bagge 1998b); the notion of "Norwegian" or "Icelandic" national identity (Lunden 1995); the construction of social identity of specific historians, writers, and poets, such as the mythographer and politician Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241) (Wanner 2008; Torfi H. Tulinius 2004) or that of the knight and lawspeaker Haukr Erlendsson (d. 1334) (Sverrir Jakobsson 2007).

Philologists and literary scholars have been concerned with the creative selves, i.e., scribes, authors, translators, as well as the created selves of the

literary characters within the texts. The field has gradually moved away from the stronghold of the "Icelandic school" of scholarship that dominated much of the twentieth century, and which promoted the originality of the Icelandic author, and downplayed the significance of religious texts, translations, or European influence. The latter has been afforded much greater consideration in recent years: Icelandic textual culture, with its uniqueness and peculiarities, is seen as inseparable from the rest of European literary heritage, religious and secular, in Latin and in the vernacular. In recent years, under the influence of material philology, studies of the creative self are more nuanced and take interest not only in notions of authorship, but also in the modes of other creative selves such as translators, scribes, rubricators, illuminators, etc. (Quinn and Lethbridge 2010; Ranković 2012; Eriksen 2014). The created self has also been studied, most often by focusing on the psychology and emotions of the characters in specific episodes or sagas (Miller 2014; Ármann Jakobsson 2008; Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2017).

The self has been discussed from an art-historical perspective as well, as for example in studies of twelfth and thirteenth century sculpted heads in Scandinavian churches that have been interpreted as representations, or portraits, of specific rulers (Svanberg 1987). The individuality of architects, artists, and manuscript illuminators has also come to the fore recently, often contextualized within a discussion of how artistic schools and workshops conditioned an artist's room for creativity (Kausland 2016; Liepe 2009). Archaeologists have discussed concepts like identity, ethnicity, gender, and social class based on various groups of excavated materials (Olsen 1997, 2010), and recent scientific methods, such as isotop-analysis, allow for a much more direct study of the medieval individuals, how they lived, what they ate, where they came from, and how they died (Naumann, Price and Richards 2014).

Aim of This Book

Aiming to build upon and complement the current scholarly debates, this anthology has two main goals. First, we aspire to investigate the self not in a theoretically and methodologically uniform way, but in a *theoretically and methodologically explicit way*. The authors experiment with various approaches to the medieval self, and the book as a whole will reveal how the difference in our own standpoint as researchers conditions the way we perceive of the medieval self. This will be done based on various types of sources – texts of various genres and languages (Middle English, Old Norse, and Latin), runic inscriptions and Roman alphabetic manuscripts, manuscripts as cultural objects, art and architecture, and archaeological

remains. Second, the book will discuss what processes and practices the self engaged with in the cultural context of *Viking and medieval western Scandinavia*. We will focus on *what the self **does** within this culture and its numerous social spaces*: are the self's choices and expressions conditioned by the social spaces, or vice versa? Further, we will discuss how the dynamics between the self and social spaces are conditioned by the materiality, genre, discourse, and language of the material studied. Is the self conditioned by external factors or does the self come prior to cultural expressions? The book does not aim for an exhaustive discussion of the self in Viking and medieval western Scandinavia, but it aims for breadth and variety with regard to theoretical starting points, approaches, and sources used. This has the potential to reveal overlap and compatibility between the various approaches, when seen in relationship to each other, and this may potentially contribute to the existent debates of medieval and modern selves.

Structure of the Book

The articles in this book adopt a variety of approaches to the medieval self, sometimes anchored in a specific theoretical starting point, other times experimenting with an eclectic combination of theories. The first introductory article of the book by David Gary Shaw adopts exactly such an eclectic approach to the self, experimenting with an eclectic combination of theories. Shaw develops further some of the perspectives mentioned in this introduction, combines them with a series of others, and tests them out in a case study on traveling selves in fifteenth-century England. This article demonstrates how combining various theories may play out in the study of the medieval self, and it is therefore of central significance in the narrative of the book as a whole. Shaw's observations on theoretical eclecticism will be followed by various studies of the self, based on Scandinavian material, *c*. 800–1500, mostly from Norway and Iceland, but also from Denmark and Sweden.

The majority of the articles in the book discuss one type of cultural expression, i.e., a text, an object, a building, or an archaeological site. Therefore, the main organizational principle of the book will be based on the type of materiality of the cultural expression studied. This organizational principle is, however, not intended to create divisions between the different materialities, but rather to highlight the fluidity and overlaps between the discussions. A few of the authors discuss the representation of the self in different materialities, and in the book as a whole, we search to investigate how the representations of the self are conditioned by materiality.

In the first part of the book, authors discuss selves based mostly on texts (Eriksen and Turner, Steen, Torfi H. Tulinius, Bandlien, Johansson, Eriksen, Diesen, Rønning Nordby). There are, however, several variables that show the complexities of studying the self, based on text. (1) Textual *materiality*: Texts are studied on various levels: as a text work (Eriksen and Turner, Steen, Torfi H. Tulinius, Diesen, Rønning Nordby), as an oral composition (Johansson), based on a given manuscripts (Johansson, Eriksen), or based on the comparison between a text work and seals (Bandlien). (2) *Genre*: Texts belong to various genres, including royal historiographies (Steen and Bandlien), Sagas of Icelanders (Johansson, Torfi H. Tulinius, Eriksen), contemporary sagas (Torfi H. Tulinius), skaldic poetry (Johansson), hagiography (Diesen), and law material (Rønning Nordby). (3) *Language*: Texts are written either in Latin (Diesen) or in the vernacular Norse (everyone else). (4) *Theory*: Last but not least, texts are studied either from a cultural perspective (esp. Torfi H. Tulinius, Bandlien), cognitive perspective (esp. Eriksen and Turner, Steen, Eriksen), or from an empirical perspective (esp. Johansson, Rønning Nordby).

In the second part of the book, the self is studied based mostly on artifacts, buildings, or other types of material remnants (Naumann, Croix, Bauer, Bonde, Holmqvist). These studies also vary according to similar variables. (1) *Materiality*: The self is studied based on human remains / skeletons (Naumann), archeological artifacts and sites (Croix), urban buildings (Bauer), medieval churches (Bonde, Holmqvist), physical spaces with runic inscriptions (Holmqvist), or comparison between material artifacts and textual and linguistic expressions (Bauer, Holmqvist). (2) and (3) *Genre and language* are not equally easy to discuss based on material artifacts, but the discourses taking place may be classified depending on the degree of formality of the context where the artifacts are used or produced, i.e., formal / political / religious contexts (Bauer, Bonde, Holmqvist) or domestic / informal contexts (Croix, Holmqvist, Naumann). (4) The authors use *various theoretical starting points* here, too, including cultural and practice theory (Naumann, Croix, Bonde, Holmqvist), cognitive theory (Holmqvist), or with focus on the empirical material (Bauer) [see table below].

After Shaw's introductory essay, Stefka G. Eriksen and Mark Turner debate how *cognitive theory* may contribute to perceiving the selves responsible for and represented in the Old Norse literary corpus, by focusing on four main topics: the cognitive premises for cultural variation; blending and creation of stories; the conception of a stable self; making choices. These discussions are illustrated with examples from a wide range of Old Norse poetry and prose and conclude with a reflection on the complementarity of traditional philological / literary and cognitive interpretations. Francis Steen elaborates further on the usefulness of cognitive theory when reading Old Norse royal historiography, by

taking a closer look at *Sverris saga* and reading it as a representation of human cognition. Steen recounts the self's amazing ability to perceive promising possibilities and available affordances and demonstrates how King Sverrir has an unusual capacity for perceiving possibilities, how he successfully exploits and navigates all the options available to him, no matter how remote his chances are, but how, at the end of his reign, he is unable to escape the downside consequences of the precarious self. Bjørn Bandlien continues the discussion of *Sverris saga*, and as a juxtaposition to Steen's cognitive analysis, he leans on cultural theoreticians such as Bourdieu, Lefebvre, and Bakhtin. He reads King Sverrir's upbringing and early education as a priest on the Faroe Islands, the development of his career, and his later kingship as a testimony to a dialogic self – the king is both a lion and a lamb. Bandlien discusses whether the same doubleness is represented in the visual images on King Sverrir's seal. Bandlien reads *Sverris saga* as a twelfth-century text work, contextualized in the time it was supposedly written. A similar approach is adopted by Torfi H. Tulinius, who addresses the topics of inner subjectivity, individuality, and sense of otherness in *Sturlunga saga* and some of the Sagas of Icelanders, written during the twelfth and thirteenth century. He shows how the demands on the individual, juxtaposed with the rise of pastoral power, were often at odds with social customs, even two to three hundred years after the conversion. In the next article, Karl G. Johansson problematizes the method used so far and shows that the "self" in a medieval text may represent at least three different selves. Using the poem *Sonatorrek* as an example, Johansson argues that the self represented in it can be either the self of the tenth-century poet Egill Skallagrímsson; the self of the author or compiler of the thirteenth-century *Egils saga*, who chose to include just the first stanza of the poem; or the self of the compiler of the seventeenth century manuscript where the whole poem is preserved. Stefka G. Eriksen pursues this latter perspective even further by focusing on the materiality of medieval manuscripts as a source for the scribe's and reader's selves. Studying two manuscripts of *Njáls saga*, Eriksen shows how the way the manuscripts were written and the way the texts were structured by initials may reflect the senders' intentions to infuse the text with a given meaning and to invite the readers to pursue their own meaning-making and interpretative process.

So far, all texts discussed have been narrative, including both historiographical genres and fiction. The next analysis of the medieval self in text, by Ole-Albert Rønning Nordby, focuses on the normative genre of legal texts from thirteenth-century Norway. Rønning Nordby studies the development of *einseiðr*, an oath type that allowed an individual to swear by himself without oath helpers, and thus examines how the use of the concept of individuality developed in medieval customary law, influenced by and in contact with systems of learned law.

The last article in the text-focused section of the book changes to another variable of text, namely language. Rakel Igland Diesen turns to the agency of children as represented in Nordic hagiography from the Middle Ages, in both Latin and the vernacular (such as Icelandic bishops' sagas and miracles). Including children as a social group expands the history we can tell, including that about the medieval self. Many of the children in these sources are disabled or impaired and then miraculously cured. Diesen argues that the sources reflect both children's actions and voices, as well as the agency and lived experience of the children themselves. However, the sources are seen as a combination of the point of views of the *miraculés*, the community, the hagiographer. Through transmission, the sources may have become prescriptive about how to engage in devotion and pilgrimage and how to perceive of children as devotional agents.

In the second part of the book, the authors turn to representations of the self in material sources, other than manuscripts. Elise Naumann discusses the individual through the concept of human biographies and based on archaeological human remains from the earliest phase of medieval Oslo. She argues that even then, *c*. 1000–1200, individuals had a sense of identity which could be pursued and developed through everyday habits, such as eating various types of foods. As today, the type of food people ate seems to have been closely related either to a self-chosen sense of self or socially defined identity. Sarah Croix also discusses the process of self-identification, by focusing on the activity of weaving in various settlement sites. She argues that the experience of the gendered self is a correlate of the individual's social status, which defines specific boundaries within which their sense of agency may be facilitated or inhibited. This is done through the performance of the same activity taking different meanings depending on who, where, and for what purpose it was conducted. Other types of activities that seem to have been linked to a sense of self, self-assertion, or private ownership is discussed by Egil L. Bauer. He juxtaposes the change in tenement structures in medieval Oslo, *c*. 1200–1500 as revealed by archaeological excavations, on the one hand, and the change in Oslo tenements named after individuals in the Norwegian diploma material, on the other. The study of changing patterns is focused around periods of known medieval fires and the Black Death. Based on the change-patterns in the two source groups, Bauer argues that the names of named tenements in medieval Oslo may have had different functions through time, spanning from marking private property, to simply designating a specific place without reflecting the identity of the owner. Studying the two source groups together reveals new insights about processes of claiming private property, signifying social status, and the development of the urban population in medieval Oslo. Line M. Bonde turns to a different type of buildings, namely Danish churches during the long twelfth century, and

argues that one of their main and most repetitive decorative motifs – the arcade-motif – may be understood as reflecting an intended social and ritual practice. Bonde argues that the arcade was intended to function as a framework during the ritual practice, which was to trigger the self's memory and cognitive process of identifying and relating personal, local, and universal history. In conclusion, KAREN LANGSHOLT HOLMQVIST studies the interaction between architectural structures and verbal expressions of self. She turns to another group of individual expressions, namely those of the Norse people who left runic inscriptions on the walls of the medieval Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim and on the Neolithic chambered tomb of Maeshowe, Orkney. A medieval cathedral and a Neolithic tomb offer widely different contexts for a carver wanting to leave a runic inscription, and Holmqvist discusses how the physical and cultural context contributed to shaping the inscriptions. Moreover, she studies the selves represented in the inscriptions and discusses whether these may be seen as a social practice or remnants of individual cognitive processes, or both.

Holmqvist's eclectic approach with regard to both the theoretical starting point and material studied takes us back to the main aims of this book, which will be emphasized in the concluding article of the book. Here the editors will collect the threads from the individual articles and return to the main questions: (1) How does a specific theoretical and methodological starting point condition the way we discuss the self, and what are the variables of the self that become visible depending on our chosen starting point? (2) How do the selves of Viking and medieval Scandinavia interact with the various social spaces of this cultural context, and how are these dynamics conditioned by the materiality, genre, language, and discourse of the material studied. Is the self conditioned by external factors, or does the self come prior to cultural expressions? Achieving these aims will provide relevant contribution to existent debates of medieval and modern selves.

Table 1: Overview of the content of the articles, including theoretical orientation, materiality studied, discourse and practice discussed, language and/or genre of the sources, and geographical and temporal context.

	Theory	Materiality	Discourse / Practice	Language / Genre	Context
David Gary Shaw	Eclectic	Text works, documents	Traveling	Middle English	England, 1400s
S. Eriksen and M. Turner	Cognitive	Text works	Culture and story creating, blending	Old Norse / poetry and prose	Norway / Iceland, *c.* 1200–1500
Francis Steen	Cognitive	Text works	Stabilizing the self and navigating socially	Old Norse / Historiography	Norway / Iceland, 1100s
Bjørn Bandlien	Cultural	Text works, seals	Self-representing and self-promoting	Old Norse / Historiography	Norway / Iceland, 1100s
Torfi H. Tulinius	Cultural	Text works	Existing in a conflict	Old Norse / prose	Iceland, 1200–1300s
Karl G. Johansson	–	Oral compositions, text works, MSS	Composing / writing / copying	Old Norse / Skaldic poetry, Sagas of Icelanders	Iceland, 900–1600s
Stefka G. Eriksen	Cognitive	MSS	Copying / reading / interpreting	Old Norse / Sagas of Icelanders	Iceland, 1300s
Ole-Albert Rønning Nordby	–	Text works, documents	Creating norms / swearing in oneself	Old Norse / Laws	Norway 1100–1200s
Rakel I. Diesen	–	Text works	Projecting agency / Culture creating	Latin / Hagiography	Norway / Iceland / Sweden, *c.* 1100–1400
Elise Naumann	Cultural	Human remains	Eating	–	Norway, *c.* 1000–1200

Sarah Croix	Cultural	Archeology: sites and artifacts	Weaving	–	Norway / Denmark, *c*. 800–1000
Egil L. Bauer	–	Urban buildings, place names	Housebuilding and name-giving	–	Norway, *c*. 1200–1500
Line M. Bonde	Practice theory	Churches, ornaments	Participating in mass	–	Denmark, 1200s
Karen L. Holmqvist	Eclectic	Nidaros Cathedral, Maeshowe, runic inscriptions	Carving runic inscriptions	Old Norse / Graffiti	Norway, *c*. 1150–1400s / Orkney, 1150s

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David Gary Shaw

The Networked Historical Self, Traveling Version

Abstract: The self is historical, a long-lived concept that we need to understand anew, as a function of networks of ideas, things, animals, and bodies rather than as a subject or simple psyche. The self is in a way a series of actions and connections rather than a thing. To explore this new theory of the historical self, we examine the traveling self in medieval England, showing how the self is situationally variable, but more precisely that mobility and displacement from the familiar change the character and experience of the self. The traveler's relation to the physical challenges of a journey, including finding the way, managing horse or ship, grasping new social and legal environments, and trying to center the self through hospitality in inns and hostels shape a distinctive networked self: links to others and time itself will be felt differently. Crucially, selves are shaped differently not only in each historical era but varying through each life.

Keywords: actor networks, traveling self, mobility, social networks, medieval travel, horses, inns

> *Or I can relate the reality, a song about myself –*
> *go on about the going, how I in toilsome times*
> *often endured desperate days.*
> (Old English poem, *The Seafarer*, ll. 1–3, trans. Hostetter n.d.)[1]

The Historical Self

Like most things, the self is historical. Vague as it is as a concept, the self endures but always changes. The self and its related concepts – the subject, the agent, the soul and even the body – have gone through frequent and trenchant

1 "Maeg ic be me sylfum. soðgied wrecan,
siþas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum
Earfoðhwile oftþrowade. . . ."

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critique within the social, political, and humanistic studies over the last century or so (Dean 1992; Foucault 1983; Althusser and Balibar 1977, 30–38). Part of the fruits of those many wars and interventions has to be the view that whatever else it is, the self has existed in historiography and is so deeply historical to resist a simple or even vaguely simple and convincing definition or typology. It captures and expresses change and diversity in a way that makes it seem to be what Reinhart Koselleck called a concept, a potent term that links with the world so robustly and through many contexts and shades of meaning as to contain diverse and even contradictory senses within it. Such concepts are always productively ambiguous (Koselleck 1985, 83–85). The self crosses time but is not timeless or eternal. What I mean to assert without much demonstration is that the category of self is one of *ours* – the hundred-year present – that seems to have purchase to analyze *others*, those many pasts and presents we study, certainly the medieval worlds.

Many ideas push and pull within the self-concept like the self itself. It is a fertile wonder of a notion. There have been herculean labors to try to discern the self's supposed oneness and these studies – however empirically revealing – are often trying to see the self as an expression or an instance of an underlying logic or thing. Usually they derive from psychological, philosophical, or sociological traditions – those timeless studies. In history, they might be harder to come by but the tradition of psychoanalytic histories, for instance, has had notable successes (Erickson 1958; Pomper 1985). Among medieval historians, a proponent is Nancy Partner, many of whose works, for instance "No Sex, No Gender" (1993), provide a subtle and compelling example of how Freudian thought and its stable logic of the self-psyche opens doors of specific self-understanding. She has not been alone (Runia 2014).

What is more, the stakes for the medieval historical self are historiographically significant. It fits into some powerful narrative frameworks. First, there was the progressivist hypothesis, which saw the self as the product of modernity and the fullness of historical time. The Middle Ages was in various ways defective or merely on-the-way to greater things. Here the debates around the 'start' of individuality were crucial (Burckhardt 1990; Morris 1972; Bynum 1980). It is a persistent concern. Franz Arlinghaus (2015) has recently argued from a systems-theory point of view that subtly continues the link of periodization to the varying character of the medieval and modern individual.

Another version shifts attention to the consequences of the critique of the subject as cultural product, again, always again, of the early modern period. The famous self-fashioning of Stephen Greenblatt's (1980) world played into both sides of this fantasy, showing the way but in the new and potent clothes of cultural creation. The self itself was most uncertain, but could put on a show. But

there were many other, less creative models in which the self was acquired, rather like Weber's shell hard as steel (or iron cage), to form us but never to be cast off.

Often the destination of the modernist subject was no longer that happy a place to be, and here the self did struggle. All but the late work of Michel Foucault was important in helping to shape the new darkness of the subject of the early modern world. Not only, to quote Sarah Spence (1996, 13), was "the certainty of the Cartesian subject . . . built on very uncertain, shifting grounds," but it was a self, a subjectivity that produced rather the conditions for its own disciplining by the frameworks of power, culture, and discursive formations that were wholly beyond it. It was not in its own control (Foucault 1975, 1963). It was not at all an independent force. In some ways, the relation of what scholars mean by the self and what they mean by the subject was underexplored, but there was a relationship and a taint at play, the critique of one tended to disable, to subordinate the other, yet without eliminating it. Language as the iron-bound discourse did display the contours of such a self as we had.

Of course, it was the norm within sociological theory to limit or incorporate the self within the more dominant structures of society. Marx's (e.g., 2000) decisive approach relegated and contained the self and the agent, while the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1980), whose influence still grows, often seemed to incorporate the self and its shadow agency only to enchain it through the poison pill of the *habitus*, the accumulated dispositions that provide the repertoire of reaction. The self's feeling and acting were reduced to little more than an epiphenomenon, just as the structuralist literary critics argued that it was language that spoke, using its puppet of authors and authorship (Barthes 1978, 147–48). These structuralist assumptions were important to those working historically, such as Foucault, but also were powerful within the theory of history itself within the so-called linguistic turn (e.g., White 1975; Spiegel 1997).

Yet histories of the self, even as culture's marionettes, could still be usefully imagined even as the self's character was changed. Indeed, after a period of grief, there has been in more recent years a distinctive tacking back towards a sort of stability in thinking about the possibilities of the self or some of its components. Here, some of the most important sources and resources have been the offerings of the natural or behavioral sciences, such as cognitive science and neuropsychology. Other papers in this volume provide more concentrated discussion of both the influence and potential of such work. For some scholars, contemporary science provides a reset for productive agendas without relying on merely speculative notions from old theories. Now, it is a new and flexible sense of human nature that presses on history.

Among medievalists, the work of Daniel Lord Smail is notable here, his "deep" historical approach focusing more on the brain and its mind. Impressed

by ideas such as the plasticity associated with contemporary neurological research, Smail (2014) proposes a sort of "neurohistorical approach" that assists the historian in picking out and interpreting human behaviors that affect the historical record. So, the core connection of people and property, of hoarding behavior, for instance, can be understood anew, perhaps for the first time actually. Selves are part of these processes, emergent sometimes through them.

In pointing to some of the ways that thinking about the self in recent history and medieval studies has developed, I am not trying to criticize these developments. Rather, I am underlining that the many approaches to the self, most explicitly sensitive to the sources or contexts of history, are *all* committed to the historical existence of some sort of self or expressions of the self in the past. Methods and approaches have varied sufficiently to make it clear that the self mattered but is much contested, always. For Koselleck, contestation was the crux of key concepts (Pankakoski 2010).

The debates reflect the self's large variability and yet its analytic continuity: roughly speaking, we know the sort of thing we're talking about, but we easily contradict each other about details and significance. Why is this? Why can we fight in so many ways about the self? More than the shape of the human body, the shape of the self is something we can disagree about – its importance, its relationship with other concepts, practices, and places, with religion, economics, society, but also its 'core' character. But, as another medieval historian keenly interested in matters of the self and individuation has argued, "the actual shape of theory in historical time is primarily formed through its engagement with specific contemporary events" (Bedos-Rezak 2010, 1–2).

Indeed, the self's complexity is a function of theorizing itself but also of the very character of the past and its study. The past has its own theories and when it both shares overlapping concepts and theories with the world of later investigators – ours – we have a very complicated matrix for understanding and interpretation. Unlike some concepts from the past, the self is also one of ours. Therefore, the character of the historical self always remains a function of the interplay of actively changing contemporary categories of the self with the evidence, sources, and ideas closely found 'in' the period under study *and* the categorial pressure of other related notions whose temporality might be best captured by Koselleck's (2002, 8 and 168) idea of the "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous." In other words, the self retains and deploys in tense, sometimes contradictory, ways its multiplicity of possibilities of understanding and application. This in turn means that it cannot be easily or properly or usefully understood to derive from the stipulations of any particular science of the twentieth or twenty-first century. Scientists might assert themselves, but historians know it's a long, hard fought story, with no ending in sight.

The historical self is the concept that contains the cognitive self, the Romantic self, the self in dialogue with the soul, our great Aunt Edith's self, and all the bits and pieces that assemble to demonstrate and show that such things can exist as concepts and be instantiated in the world, which is – narrow, technical abstractions aside – a historical world. The self is the historical self, first and foremost.

This is a philosophical point, however, but it does suggest that in understanding the self in history, we have a great variety of useful and interesting sources, problems, and concepts that very much engage contemporary notions from the past, from the present, and the past's own notions, all in a very vital, very uncertain bundle. No wonder the self is so interesting, persistent, and contentious.

Stretching the Self: From Punctual, to Social, to Networked

If my arguments for the complexity and even necessity of the historical self might seem speculative, the methodological concerns still press us to theorize more fully the sort of self best suited analytically for our historical work. Thoreau (1964, 81) said: "I am a parcel of vain strivings tied" and there are clues for our practice in seeing that selves are made of a diversity of strivings, of actions in the world. They are also only focused with effort. What is more, selves are most variable, not only person to person, era to era, but within the individual on a daily, even hourly basis. Yet somehow, they come together. This also suggests that the analysis of the historical self ought to look for a very open and diverse framework into which many different elements and narratives, proofs and possibilities might fit, including many that we have already discussed. Both as a world of researchers and in individual research, a networked approach is beneficial. It is loose and polyvalent. Here, the insights of cognitive theory and discursive and deconstructive reflection among others can combine to help us, authorizing the sense that the self is necessarily diverse and distributed, even fragmented. The holistic self needs merely to take its appropriate place in the theatre of the self, not in the director's chair.

This makes us ask how we should stretch the concept of the self effectively? In history, there are so many things and forces that might shape and affect it. The self's manifestations will be precipitated by complex interactions, but a network is not the same as generic context. Networks prioritize the most likely and real connections. We can expect to bring into association

the bodily person, including speech and writing, which are usually the results of bodily actions. Indeed, semantic agency, the doing we achieve by using and changing language is key (Shaw 2012, 484–6). So, too, are emotions. The landmark work by medievalist Barbara Rosenwein (2006) helped to demonstrate the social and group element of emotions, but these very much tie to the self's activity. Monique Scheer (2012, 20) crucially argues that "[e]motions emerge from bodily knowledge." Looking for emotions and emotional practices has the added benefit of being a linking mechanism that pulls the person and body towards other elements to make networking connections. Emotions are embodied and embedded and often scripted. Semantic agency enables us to vary the script where language and emotion meet. I would push the point to say that what goes for the emotions goes for the self.

The self can also be seen to work through practices and routines. To say this is to show how much we can properly learn from practice theory, including Bourdieu's notions. The more pragmatic turn within this approach suggests that there are routines of a sort, networks of their own, "open-ended spatial-temporal manifolds of actions" (Schatzki 2005, 471) to which people can be connected to enable reasonable or useful action. Expected speech acts and emotional dispositions might operate within these, and they provide ways of structuring when and what the self will express. There is no language or discourse that controls the game without us – the talkers – that includes the creativity of semantic agency. We need to keep the historical and networked self filled with the spirit of structuration (Giddens 1984). Here, the actions of the individual, including speech acts, always sustain by replication and change by innovation or variance, the way language and practices develop.

It is a good guide to consider, as the later Foucault helped to show us, that selves can be very ostentatiously and meticulously cultivated and cared for, so the ways and means of any self-cultivation are to be watched for historically (Foucault 1978). The practice of journal-keeping in the nineteenth century (Gay 1985) or confession in the medieval church were comparable. Some ways of life build up the explicit self, some not. Even when arguing against making the highly articulated self normative, it remains part of a continuum of self-expression.

Without question, the role of things, place, animals, and materiality deserves the closest attention in stretching the self in networks. In other words, we need to approach the self not only from long narrative texts or philosophical or theological treatises but in the small broken or isolated gesture or phrase, sedimented pottery, a painted gargoyle, all, any parts of a world in which selves were made, managed, meant, and acted (Jervis 2017).

In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour pushes the point that we suffer in our analyses of the world by enforcing a dichotomy, indeed a dualism

between things and the human, nature and culture, freedom and necessity and society. Our intellectual habits and institutions police their relation, stopping contamination. We need rather to accept a sort of fusion of "object-discourse-nature-society" through his "Parliament of Things" (Latour 1994, 144).

It is beneficial to consider more explicitly some of the insights of Latour (2005) and his group's "actor network theory," which provides a sort of method through tracing actual associations that will help us to prepare for seeing the distributed, decentralized self (Law 2009). Three points assist: first, with actor network theory we put the open-ended network at the center of historical ontology. There are no independent egos or pre-existent and stable structures. There are actor-networks; everything that happens is somehow a network, a more or less stable, a more or less unstable center of activity. We might see a group of links around the self as constituting one of these.

Second, these *actor networks* are heterogeneous, governed by what is sometimes called the *principle of generalized symmetry*. This is the point of the parliament of things. For us, this means our approach cannot be merely *social* or *psychological* or one that imagines there are real boundaries between the material and the social, the human and the animal: we must be agnostic and yet sensitive to whatever is within the network and allowing something, the self in our case, to do.

Third, networks, the selves for us, only exist when they act. This is to say there must be *an acting* underway for us rightly to suppose that something was at play historically and this is so for selves, too. It is perhaps why selves might be more intermittent than the bodies they travel with. Operationally, we must be historically skeptical of drawing on unobservable elements for understanding what moves before us, so to speak. It's not that the self is always there to help us explain phenomena: it is not an underlying subject. It must be acting with other entities, but there only in the doing. This at least has its analogue as death or life.

Actor-network theory's "principle of generalized symmetry" – mixing people and things – presses us this way, and the method of following one acting element in a network until you find another makes the method clear. This combines with the need to imagine our sources as elements needing careful combination based on tracing what they actually are doing and what they actually touched. So, we go from practices to matter, action to narrative, self-consciousness to simple suffering, always remembering the motion, action, and complicity of things and animals as much as people.

We might say then that the self, whatever it is, is a function of many things together, just as it was with an Anglo-Saxon seafarer, imagine an actual seafarer, "bound," poor man, by "frost's fetters" (forste gebunden, caldum clommum, *Seafarer* 1996, ll. 9–10). There were the concepts and the man, but these need as

well to take account, as the poem certainly does, of the materialities that enable, some hidden, some not. There was the wind, the strong dark water, the ship's laboring wood, and the "terrible waves' rolling" (atol yþa gewealc, *Seafarer* 1996, l. 6), all lashed together by the self's reflection amidst frightening weather that destabilizes travel and hope, forcing the "narrow night-watch" (nearo nihtwaco, *Seafarer* 1996, 33; Hostetter 2019, l. 7).

The Traveling Self in Medieval England

On this note of voyaging, it is particularly interesting to revisit the issue of how travel worked on the self, and the following is given as a small case study of the networked historical self, loosely assembling some elements in action. As the eleventh-century *Seafarer* noted: it was different for those who know "very little of the perilous paths, living in the cities" (Hostetter 2019, ll. 27–28). First, the idea that the traveling self might be very variable emerges, since traveling puts the self into a different sort of flow that will shape its experience during that activity, changing its action framework and emotional lexicon, for instance. Moreover, the difference in experiencing travel once or experiencing it many times significantly modifies the traveling self, knowledge adjusting expectations. While there will obviously be great individual diversity, there is likely still to be pattern and learning curves and habit formation. This will be adjusted further by the domestic or exotic question: what is the relation between alienation in travel and the repetition that is experience? Some people seek othering in sublime pilgrimage perhaps or just a jaunt to Canterbury; some have it thrust upon them, as one is reminded by the stories of William Jordan's (2015) criminal exiles, forced to 'abjure the realm', their home, forever. I use the language of alienation but I also mean in the framework of actor-network theory how well or easily a network works, how smoothly a self can shift to travel. The meaning of routine or extraordinary, exotic or domestic is down to this question of familiarity and comfort. Some networks are so well established they disappear into their smoothness. Others are struggling to exist, the elements fighting the plan: at the worst, things just break down. I go so far as to argue in this respect that the Middle Ages innovated business travel; the difference between early medieval and later is revolutionary.

Within the framework of the networked self, however, we must see that the self's content is not just up to the traveler, to his or her feelings, reflections, and stories in Stoic isolation. It is also an effect of the surrounding world and in the social context: travelers were changed by what travel did to them and what others thought of travel as well, and they didn't have to recognize this for it to

be a matter of their self. In a way, that's the methodological point of the concept of networked and embodied self.

Here is a typical law of the early English kingdoms, from seventh-century Wessex: "If a man from afar, or a stranger, travels through a wood off the highway and neither shouts nor blows a horn, he shall be assumed to be a thief, and as such may be either slain or put to ransom" (Attenborough 1922, 42–43).[2] If the stranger did make it to a safe house, and stays three days in that house, he is part of that host's household, his crimes the host's problem (Attenborough 1922, 15, 20–21). Together, then, the space of travel was small and the social identity in that space was difficult. The laws of belonging made complicated realities when you left home, when you left the special safety of the king's highway, for you and your possible host. In travel, one lost familiar networks of place, people, road, and sometimes even law and language. People were reshaped for a bit by geography and sound: roads, woods, and the horn that calls and saves.

Needless to say, six or seven hundred years later, say 1370 and on, things were normally very different, but the complexities of the traveling self remained and the old distinction was reinscribed. Travelers entered longer, sometimes smoother networks. Then it mattered if you were a royal subject inside the country or if you were beyond your lord's laws. The passport, the letter of credence or safe conduct, was created partly to cope with this. Kings, lords, and bishops might authorize them (Given-Wilson et al. 2005, *sub* January 1442; Capes 1909, 21). The claim of being a Christian wanderer, that is, a pilgrim, marked often with a cross on your clothing, was an early sort of passport, after all. Certainly, over time, validation and protection by king and church had created a cordon sanitaire along which the traveler might move more safely. This included the King's protected highways as well as key tokens of friendship or patronage, the actual introductory letter of protection. In the sixteenth century, when there was strong anxiety over outsiders, counterfeiting protections was also on the rise (Cressy 2016, 52).

The traveling self was threatened by local laws. When outside England, legal doubts and ignorance about the laws could be aggravated by the fear that language added to alienation. Margery Kempe moved through a sort of dangerous miasma when she lost her guides (Kempe 2000, 176–86). Gender shifts the risks as well. By the same token, one reason to learn a bit of a foreign language was to build into local networks better. For the English, this often meant working in a French milieu, and we are lucky to have an English-produced, French-language

2 "Gif feorcund mon oððe fremde. Butan wege geond wudu gonge 7 ne hrieme ne horn blawe, for þeof he bi- to profianne, oððe to sleanne oððe aliesanne."

learning text from around 1396 that shows a considerable interest in the practicalities of travel, whose difficulties it was meant to smooth (Meyer 1873, 373).

The case of ambassadors into France provides a different angle and reminds us that the relationality and status of the traveler might change at any time and so too do the pressures on the self's network. In 1442, Henry VI sent three ambassadors to Bordeaux with the idea of arranging a marriage for the king with one of the Comte d'Armagnac's daughters. Eminent though the men were, including the king's secretary Thomas Beckington, their passage and transition from protected English elite to men in a warzone and possible targets and hostages, transformed their security. The circumstances in English Guienne had so declined in this period that they were forced to stay back near Bordeaux, because they could not ensure safe passage through enemy-harassed territories. Others did travel on their behalf, presumably more simply and anonymously than the king's personal advisors (Nichols 1828, 14–40).

One of travels' most interesting aspects is the potential to change identity through just these sorts of circumstance: ignorance or disinterest in who you were puts the self under pressure to keep its shape. Often in travel, no one knows you, or even your type. But it also then serves to challenge the continuity of that very identity. From within network thinking, the question is partly that the geographic displacement creates a social displacement with potential personal effects. Physical threats from weather, hunger, or the sea can be similarly corrosive. Finding new agents with whom to interact effectively sums up the coping mechanisms often required. The actor tries to connect old networks to new or at least to get a foothold up in the new – language helps, familiarity helps, a knowing companion helps. When I have spoken of the self being sometimes a matter of phase, this is what I mean. There are moments for expressing self but others for merely suffering the world, which can turn people, their horses, their ideas, into so much cold, wet stuff.

The ambassadors' prestige added to their vulnerability in the war situation, just as other selves were more vulnerable in the very act of traveling domestically and in an inverse way to their social role and networks protecting them at home. A woman traveling alone, a modest man walking with only a stick and so unarmed in England would be more vulnerable than these ambassadors on the same road. Physical vulnerability was a fear. The Statute of Westminster of 1286 had set down new targets for improvement in the face of persistent complaints about safety:

> it is commanded that highways leading from one market town to another shall be enlarged, . . . so that there be neither dyke, underwood, nor bush whereby a man may lurk to do hurt, near to the way, within two hundred foot of the one side and two hundred foot on the other side; . . . so as it shall be clear underneath. (*Statutes of the Realm* 1810, 97)

So, there was fear in the passages through the woods, in part, however, because so many people were passing, as the pace of life for some picked up. Beside the fear, however, is the domestication of travel, perhaps. For some, it was more normal and so its impact on their experience was less, literally, *outlandish*. Small fears magnified into legislation. Who and where you were worked to affect the sense of identity and vulnerability as you traveled.

The fifteenth-century knight Peter Idley wrote a book of advice for his son and imagined danger in his going about his business:

> And with straunge men thou fortune to fare,
> If they desire the besily to *know* thy way,
> Loke thou be of hem right well ware
> Lest they betrappe the into her snare;
> ffor it is the condicion ofte of a theiff,
> As by experience it is seen ins preiff.
> . . .
> Ride on his right hande if he have a spere,
> There is thavantage as for theat season;
> And if a swered thou se that he beere,
> Ride on his lifte hande, for that is reason.
> Undre feire speche ofte is hidde treason;
> Therefore with straunge folk take not thy gate
> At no season erly ne late.
>
> (Idley, ll. 96–97)

The marginalities mattered here. Travel made you a better target and the trees conspired. Networks are a sort of conspiracy of things and people when the robbers dashed from behind trees. It is relevant then that the selves that traveled best traveled as part of unity of horse and rider and weapons, of steel and iron-shod hoof. The defensive intricacies in Idley's account all assume at least that much. Riders were safer and traveling on horseback was the dominant mode of business travel, whether alone or in company, true in the fiction of the *Canterbury Tales*, where all but one pilgrim ride, and in the realities, too. They rode for comparative advantage.

It is perhaps for that reason, however, that the notion of walking could achieve a sense of the idyllic and admirable. We probably owe it to classical antecedents, but there are from the fifteenth century even in England, pedestrian dialogues, in which men converse as they walk, so it was of course imaginable even to elite men that this might be possible, even if rather ideal. The same Thomas Beckington who feared in France was praised in a rather pastoral dialogue by scholars leaning on their walking sticks as they come over the hill, a horseless network of ease (Williams 1872, 321–4). So, there was a scale of

physical vulnerability and comfort in travel, and this is a matter of the emotional and event horizon of selves outside their homes. Generally, horses gave advantages for safety and smoothed the self's experience along the road but there was also the fantasy of leisure and company (Woolgar 1999, 181–96; Shaw 2015). The chatty self flourished at a safe walking pace.

The pace and beat of life manifested again in the ambassadorial journal seems to me to reflect this itself. Both at the outset as Beckington and company leave London and move towards a rendezvous at Plymouth and during their return at Falmouth in the days afterwards, they display the meaning of the routine and domestic, embedded in the notion of the predictable. The narration is simple, studded with dinner and supper appointments, and smooth uncommented motion from town to town, castle to manor house (Nichols 1828, 1–11, 89). By contrast, the narrated time in France is a mix of doubt, opacity, anxiety, and tedium for the embassy, to some extent submerged in the fog of war and this means the temporality of waiting. This is not just about waiting to hear the next bad news about military reversals but hoping to hear good news about the planned army of relief. It is, however, sharpened by the fact that they are unable to get to where they mean to be to finish the job assigned and have to rely instead on uncertain letters from unreliable allies, and the effects of the weather on the paints of "Hans the German," the painter charged with making portraits of the three noble daughters.

Finally, getting out of France, as getting out of England at the beginning of their mission, was touched by the effects of ship and sea, which once again render time and security deeply uncertain. On the way out, Beckington had led prayers "with a devout and humbler heart . . . to the most blessed and glorious Virgin, Mary of Eton" (Nichols 1828, 11). The Virgin Mary and maybe Eton College both are part of this complicated network of anxiety and hope. On the way back, they waited days for the winds they needed, stuck in Notre Dame near Bordeaux and then in the Garonne estuary before further delay at Crowdon (Crozon) in Brittany, the routine time-stopping work of the sea and wind. However, the narrative of the journal is transformed as soon as they make landfall again in Falmouth. Time is changed and the self is reincorporated into facile networks. I would in fact claim that temporal effects are one of the most important elements of the traveling social self.

The elements of re-domesticating the self certainly include forms of familiarity, forging or taking up other networks that reshape the self for the moment. This can come partly from memory and repetition, from being treated in the usual way, being honored as it were, in the usual way. It also, however, emerges from the character of your microgeography. The traveler is of course distinguished by moving through many situations, both material and social, indeed, it is part of why travel and actor-network theories seem made for each other,

because it is simple to recognize that successful being for the traveler is not just a matter of mind or language.

One of the key elements in the actor-networks of travel were of course the stops. If I am so far playing along the axis of degrees of alienation from the normal and network stability, a key point of consideration is stopping for the night. Alienation is the possible psychic effect but it also literally means "making other," and it was the Latin word used for foreigners in the period, a match to the English "stranger." Once again, in the ancient time, you were at the mercy of the host whose house you approached. If he didn't accept you into his protection, he could take you as the enemy and strike and the law was not on your side (Gautier 2009, 29–31). This was massively transformed in the Middle Ages, again, inflected by distance and borders, but stopping for the night was another point of potential pressure but hoped-for safety for the traveler. Within England, across Europe, a vast series of networks of hospitality had emerged: monasteries, hospitals, and increasingly by the fourteenth century commercial inns.

Materially, stopping at day's end probably releases the self from its unity with the horse and we might even see this separation as a bit symbolic, in other words, a way to note a social transformation as the person associates with a different network. Taking care of the horses well was a crucial part of the comfort or calm of arrival, and the new-style fifteenth-century inns were developed with horses in mind, offering stabling, horseshoeing, and often even horsebread, materialities that sustained the rider's honored identity (Hare 2013, 480–1; Shaw 2015).

As it turned out, the ancient responsibility of that Anglo-Saxon host, who had accepted a guest, had become the norm and, indeed, the legally binding understanding of what innkeeping was. First of all, innkeepers, like religious institutions, were expected to accept anyone who appeared and for whom they had room (Baker 2003, 839). More to the point, they were legally responsible for the security of the house and the property that guests brought under their roofs. If something was stolen while there, the innkeeper was liable to make recompense (Baker 2003, 760–764). The inn attempted to reconnect traveler with home, its securities, and some of its comforts.

Material achievements were part of this network. Geographically located where travelers would pass, the inns developed myriad capabilities for safe sociability. Rooms with fresh linen for the beds, with sufficient locks and keys for the rooms (Harrison 1968, 397–9). It would be very wrong not to see in these physical things a key piece of the self's importance and recovery in the midst of travel.

William Worcester, a fifteenth-century scholar and gentleman with perhaps more education and cultural clout than economic standing, moved on the borderline of such hospitality. He did have an eye for what would do and complained in a poem about the quality of monastic hospitality at one Norfolk abbey

(St. Benet Hulme), where he clearly didn't receive the finest: "filthy linen, cabbage without salt, new ale, stony bedding, a filthy stable, sword-like hay, stingy hospitality, a chilly fire in the chimney, the servants' wages amount to nothing, therefore the guests will leave without farewell . . . ." (Worcester 1969, 3).

Worcester left us notes on several of his trips to the West Country and these allow us to see some of the places he stayed. After riding around 20 miles a day, he would sometimes stay at the new inns, but very often he took at least some hospitality from individuals. These were typically priests and minor church officials or gentlemen, so something like very minor aristocrats. Sometimes, he met with people he knew beforehand, sometimes via references, but occasionally with strangers, some becoming, as he said of one, "my new friend" (Worcester 1969, 116–7). His intellectual connections could help, as one scholarly colleague who worked at Glastonbury Abbey got Worcester invited to the abbot's hall, a favor he noted. It was probably good, the kitchen notably special, and the company more prominent (Worcester 1969, 260–1).

It is interesting to ask whether the impressive development of the independent inn was somehow due to the fact that it formed the guest into a comfortable social shape, that gave more people a comfortable social identity in transit. For this cause, perhaps, Worcester particularly wanted to thank his host at the Bear Inn in Exeter (Worcester 1969, 116–7). Even though monasteries and lordly manor houses were quite common, widely distributed, the inns were heavily used and apparently by a wide range of social classes, too. The royal ambassadors also used inns sometimes.

A full thinking-through of the self of travelers wouldn't necessarily be a matter of versions of relative alienation but it could be; the sense of being fully at home, comfortable in your own social skin, so to speak, might be one point of engaging in social life. This would involve the creature comforts of security, knowing your horse is well taken care of, having a good meal, and clean bedding, but it would also include the degree of doubt and anxiety that one lived with. That is a good but inadequate gauge of the stability of the network into which a person might enter. There was perhaps an offset. Linking to a known network through a friend against the generic network of the inn.

For travelers especially, there was often a plan of action underway, possibly just the travel itself, but maybe other ventures, messages being carried, hopes of profit planned, the need to arrange a marriage or, like William Worcester, discover all he could about King Arthur's origins or the running of a particular estate. The traveling self was more often a business self and, as such, even the best of beds might not fully calm it down, even when one's very social status was not in flux, faced with unknown people, and strange food.

In effect, the traveling self goes in and out of phase more quickly than the usual self at home, and it can be lost happily or unhappily because of this. Its world is a series of less well-known or reliable networks, and this probably explains why it can seem that it is more overtly engaged with the materialities, too. When William Worcester's horse threw him down on the Cornish moors, all expectations of a certain world were briefly undone. For a moment, he was no rider and might have broken his neck. But in this case, he got up and resumed the network (Worcester 1969, 38–9). Things, animals, social notions, and sense of self were clearly struggling together. He was unharmed so the network proceeded, but probably more carefully. A less seasoned traveler might have lost confidence in the network entirely.

The traveling self as networked self does not give up the question of what it was like to be a person in a world, but it helps us to shape the normal zones of possibility that enabled a particular sort of historical self at a particular place and moment. The network notion does much of the work of old social history, connecting context to the social world. It also, however, is most sensitive to what I call phase, the way that certain sorts of consideration, including self-reflection and expression, might recede. In thinking of travel, we can see that the uncertainty and instability of the networks that enable travel cause the fluctuations of the self. Yet, as the Seafarer shows, thinking on it all later, drawing on memories of what has happened, even in those self-recessive moments, gives the practice of talking and writing the robust self a lot more to draw on.

In concluding, we have the opportunity to decenter the self both methodologically and ontologically. It might appear odd to advance the notion of the post-humanistic in a text committed to the self, but on the contrary I think it almost urgent. The idea is that what we call the self is still important but understanding how it exists will be aided by the framework in which it is forced more fully into its whole historical world, not just conceived as a reaction to the world, an inner dialogue afterwards. This approach should help us to understand why the self seems so much a matter of limitations and frustrations, of aspirations and phases – sometimes on, sometimes rather off.

Still, while I hope we can see how the self is shaped and affected by the world, especially in medieval travel, we might also still see the big challenge of the networked historical self here: in what does the continuity of the historical self inhere? Is it still a *personal* rather than a sort of *general* category? If the self is somehow part of a series of networks, its own-ness is at risk and this in two ways. First, if everything is networked, the self and person can as it were become only a small part of the networks at play, and there will be limited places for such a self. Second, – and this problem actually goes back to David Hume, for whom the self is "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which

succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity" (Hume 1888, 252) – is there any reason to believe in a controlling center rather than a mere succession? In combination, the self might seem both small in the picture and not in control. On Hume's minimalist account, these perceptions are, like the perceptions of anything, separate items that are sewn together by an act of mind. How do all the diverse moments of interaction that some self might go through come together and why should they be assumed to be about the same thing or otherwise together? Moreover, does a positive response merely bring us back to the belief in an underlying subject? (Scheer 2012, 206).

My shortest answer is that the most robust selves of the sort we often imagine especially in contemporary life or among medieval mystics, for instance, are achievements, not necessities, and there are a great variety of selves out there. But, more crucially, those performed selves exist in the performing within their own creative networks, which are themselves in the world, not hidden substrata. The self, in travel, or in any action or speech, is similarly not hidden but active in its doing that includes, so crucially, the emotional reactions and actions, the verbal interventions, the personal touches and expressions that create the self in its doing and saying. It is frequently emergent, just not constant. This is really never as an isolated atom, but as player in many games, rarely a mere subordinate because it reflects on what is happening. Yet, the self is not a steady master of its own experiences. Still, it acts, but it does so always in the company of others, things, like a boat or an inn, people like an innkeeper or a bandit, friends, like a horse or letter of introduction hidden in a saddle bag.

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Stefka G. Eriksen and Mark Turner

Cognitive Approaches to Old Norse Literature

Abstract: The aim of this article is to rethink the relationship between cognitive sciences and the humanities, based on studies of Old Norse literary tradition. Old Norse literature includes many of the traditional medieval genres in translations, such as saints' lives, historiographies, romances, and *chansons de geste*. Yet it also includes genres like the Sagas of Icelanders, skaldic poetry, and eddic poetry, which are deemed distinct from other medieval literatures. By discussing (1) creativity and cultural diversity; (2) stories-creation and blending; (3) the continuity in the sense of self; and (4) making choices, from the perspective of cognitive sciences and with examples from the Old Norse literary corpus, this article aims to elucidate the potential for complementarity between the two fields.

Keywords: Blended Classic Joint Attention (BCJA), creativity, conceptual blending theory, culture variation, flexibility theory, game theory, metaphors, Old Norse literature, predictability, wayfinding

Perspectives from the cognitive sciences have gradually and increasingly been deployed in various fields in the humanities – from linguistics to literary and religious studies.[1] However, such perspectives still meet ardent opposition from humanities scholars suggesting that the application of cognitive perspectives within the humanities may simply be seen as "the emperor's new clothes," providing little to nothing new to nuanced interpretive sciences. Opposition to cognitive sciences comes in various forms and may be methodological, political, philosophical, and stylistic, among others. Methodologically, cognitive sciences have been seen as reductionistic, compared to the interest in detailed and complex historiography in the humanities. The two traditions may be claimed to be interested in two separate universes: while cognitive sciences focus on causal explanation, the humanities are interested in meaning and interpretation. Politically, humanities scholars may be suspicious of cognitive / biological approaches

1 For examples in medieval studies, see Engh 2014, 2019; Harbus 2012; Lundhaug 2010.

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because of their determinism and positivism, aiming for reaching the "truth." Related to that are the philosophical arguments against cognitive sciences, which can be exemplified by feminist or colonialist critique of scientism, with its excessive confidence in what science can deliver. Last but not least, the opposition may be translated in the commonly perceived stylistic differences between hard sciences and humanities.[2]

The aim of this article is, with these oppositions in the back of our minds, to rethink the relationship between cognitive sciences and the humanities, based on studies of Old Norse literary tradition. Old Norse literature includes many of the traditional medieval genres in translations, such as saints' lives, historiographies, romances, and *chansons de geste*. Yet it also includes genres like the Icelandic Sagas of Icelanders, skaldic poetry, and eddic poetry, which are deemed distinct from other medieval literatures. The sagas, for example, are seen as unique for many reasons: their content, which concerns the settlement of Iceland and social feuds fueled by honor, loyalty and love; the elements they contain from Old Norse mythology and Scandinavia's pagan past; their sober narratological style (in stark contrast to the style of learned and romantic literature, for example); their prosimetric form, including the complex skaldic poetry; and the textual community in which they participate (runic and Latin alphabet), among other features. The skaldic and eddic poetry are unique for some of the same reasons, and especially their form, their pre-Christian mythological content, and their language. A main question in Old Norse studies is how this cultural "uniqueness" can be explained: what are the causes and who are the agents behind these cultural expressions? These questions are also central when cognitive scientists study the human mind and the cultures it creates throughout human history.

Co-authored by a cognitive scientist, Mark Turner, and an Old Norse scholar, Stefka G. Eriksen, the article aims to cast an empathetic look at the relationship between the two traditions and investigate whether the two approaches may be seen as complementary, rather than in opposition. We will discuss four different, but interrelated, aspects of culture and the self: (1) creativity and cultural diversity; (2) stories-creation and blending; (3) the continuity in the sense of self; and (4) making choices. Each of these topics will be discussed from the perspective of cognitive sciences and it will be exemplified by the Old Norse literary corpus. The aim is to elucidate the potential for complementarity between cognitive sciences and scholarship on Old Norse textual culture.

2 Based on Gabriel Levy's lecture "Cognitive Sciences and Humanities," ATTR, Trondheim, October 22, 2018.

Creativity and Cultural Diversity

The human contribution to the miracle of life all around us is obvious: we are the origin of new ideas. We hit upon new ideas, lots of them, on the fly, all the time, and we have been performing this magic for, at the very least, 50,000 years. New ideas arise constantly in human minds, and sometimes tumble out of our minds to influence other minds and change the world. We have creative insight and we recognize new possibilities. Our new ideas are not fixed instincts, like the beaver's dam-building or the bat's echolocating. Of course, like any mammal, we have such instincts, but we also have an amazing ability to invent new ideas that blow right past the confines of our local situations.

We celebrate and explore the resulting complex human diversity, but the prior, and much more difficult, scientific question is: Why is there any culture at all? Why do cultural expressions exist at the moments and places they exist? How could the capacity for such diversity have arisen? Why are human beings – in so many ways, just another great ape – so creative? The explosive cultural diversity we see in the human record has arisen evolutionarily in only the blink of an eye, merely in the last fifty thousand years, or maybe one hundred thousand: we are captives of the archaeological record, and if archaeologists discover a new cave tomorrow, perhaps we will need to adjust our understanding of these cognitive developments by moving them back in time a little. Without question, in our evolution, there has been a very recent, major change in behavior. This change was not necessary. Life got on just fine for almost its entire history without it. All other species get along just fine without anything like robust human creativity and our resulting cultural diversity. Our human abilities are extraordinarily new. What are they?

We are familiar with the kind of diversity that comes from evolutionary development of structure: when biological evolution produces different species, we expect to see different behaviors – species-wide, non-cultural behaviors. But those evolutionary innovations take a very, very long time – a span of evolutionary time – to develop. Cultural innovation is completely different. It operates at lightning speed. Through cultural innovation, extraordinary new things can be invented in 15 seconds, 15 minutes, 15 years, 150 years, 15,000 years. Evolution of mental abilities works nowhere near that fast. All neurotypical human beings everywhere for at least the last 50,000 years seem to share the identical basic mental operations, the ones that make culture possible. These basic mental operations include advanced conceptual blending, a complex and constrained mental operation that can produce a great variety of mental products (Fauconnier and Turner 2002; Turner 2014).

People and cultures use it and its creativity to produce what are often strikingly different products. We are weird in this way. The ringtail lemurs in the valley on one side of a hill and the ringtail lemurs in the valley on the other side of that hill are essentially the same. To be sure, for any such species, two different members might behave differently if they confront different environments (one lives near a lake; the other does not), or if they belong to different sexes, or if they are at different developmental stages in life. But for non-human species, such differences are relatively few and predictable. Human beings, by contrast, have spectacular individual differences, all the time. If you walk from one valley, over the hill, to another valley, the human beings in the second valley might speak a different language, wear different clothes, eat different food, have different concepts of leadership, art, honor, different religions, and so on.

The Uniqueness of Old Norse Skaldic Poetry

One prominent example of such a strikingly different cultural product, in a distant valley far up in the north, is skaldic poetry – one of the main "unique" characteristics of Old Norse literary culture. Skaldic poetry appears as part of the Icelandic Kings' sagas and Sagas of Icelanders and there is no independent collection preserving skaldic poetry alone. It has a very strict metrical form and kennings are a main element of its diction. Skaldic kennings have three main elements: the referent (unstated but inferred), the base word, and the determinant. For example, in the kenning of Úlfr Uggason, *Húsdrápa* 3/1 "interior moon of the forehead" (*innmáni ennis*) meaning an eye, "interior moon" is the base word, "the forehead" is the determinant, and "an eye" is the unstated referent.

Margaret Clunies Ross (1989) has discussed the cognitive premises behind the creation of skaldic kennings. She points to cognitive sciences, which define human cognitive categories as general knowledge systems. These systems incorporate criteria of human categorizations that structure the way we can know. These may include the relationship between a part versus the whole; the relationship between parts based on their function; the relationship between parts based on their form; analogy and contrast; and other major categories. When things interact, they form clusters which influence the way we group things. Groups may be organized into comparable or contrasting categories according to their features.

Clunies Ross argues that skaldic poetry is organized according to the same principles of such general knowledge systems. The metonymies and metaphors

of skaldic poetry are thus more than just rhetorical embellishments, but rather reveal these universal knowledge systems and structures. An example of a kenning that is based on the principles of likeness and contrast simultaneously is "yoke bear," meaning an ox (*okbjǫrn*) (cited from Clunies Ross 1989, 276, fn. 37: *Haustlǫng*, Finnur Jónsson I, 15, poem 2, st. 6, 1.4). The bear is a metaphor for the ox in terms of strength, size, and shape, while the domestication of the ox is expressed by "yoke" which also contrasts with the wildness of the bear. Example of cognitive categories' form and function may be seen in arm-kennings which are based on both the function and the form of a hand / arm: "mountain of the bow" (*fjall boga*) may thus be a kenning for a hand, referring both to its protruding form from the body (as a mountain protruding from the landscape) and its function of carrying a bow (cited from Clunies Ross 1989, 278, fn. 41: Finnur Jónsson II, 125, st. 36, 1.4). Some kennings are based on contrast in senses (dry vs. wet) and a basic understanding of the natural world: the sea may, for example, be called "sand heaven" (*sandhiminn*), where the sand is the floor of the sea and the water above is its heaven (cited from Clunies Ross 1989, 280: Þórhallr *veiðimaðr*, Finnur Jónsson, I, 182, st. 2, 1.2). A last example: kennings may also refer to the function and role of some objects (for example, protection), combined with a basic knowledge of how the body works: a mouth can thus be called a "word temple" (*orðhof*) (cited from Clunies Ross 1989, 281: *Sonatorrek*, Finnur Jónsson, I, 34, st. 5, 1.6) and the chest is referred to as "the hall of the heart" (*salr hjarta*) (cited from Clunies Ross 1989, 281: *Krákumál*, Finnur Jónsson I, 655, st. 27, 1.4). Based on these and other examples, Clunies Ross concludes that "skaldic poetry is above all an exploration of and a play with basic human categorizing powers within restricted semantic domains" (Clunies Ross 1989, 281). Skaldic poetry, with all its uniqueness, is thus only one realization of the shared basic human operations that make culture possible in the first place.

Stories and Blending

Two of the most fundamental and remarkable mental operations of the cognitively modern human mind are stories and blending. They work together to provide concepts of selves that stretch over time, space, causation, and agency. Story is a fundamental instrument of thought. Human beings think fundamentally in terms of stories. Story is the capacity to conceive of suites of meaning, including suites of reality, as composed of an interaction of objects, events, and actors who have concepts, intentions, goals, and, notably, minds that use story to conceive of the world. Rational capacities depend upon story. It is our chief

means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining. We have stories of caterpillars and butterflies, but no one imagines that caterpillars and butterflies have the mental capacity for story. Crucially, conceptions of story can stretch over enormous ranges of time, space, causation, and agency. This is possible because of powerful and flexible compressions that arise through blending (see below). The all-important conception of a stable self over time, space, causation, and agency is one of the most powerful compressions; it is the one on which we will focus below.

But first, let us consider a very small example of blending and compression: the cyclic day. In our experience, there is actually just one day and then another day and then another day and then another day, in a sequence that stretches out indefinitely, forward and backward. The days in that sequence are all quite different. They do not repeat. If we woke up today and it was exactly the same as yesterday because it was in fact the same day in every detail, we would be sure we had lost our minds. And then it would not even be the same day, because yesterday we did not think we had lost our minds. Day after day after day indefinitely, with all those differences between days, is too much to comprehend, too much to fit inside working memory, too much to carry around and manage. It is not mentally portable. So we blend these different days into a conception of a cyclic day. The pattern of blending by which we do this turns out to be extremely common: across a range of ideas, we draw analogies and disanalogies, and compress the analogies to a unit and the disanalogies to change for that unit. We say, 'My tax bill gets bigger every year.' There are analogies and disanalogies across the different days in our experience (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 94). The analogies are packed into one thing in the blend: the day. The disanalogies are packed into change for that thing: the day is cyclic; it starts over every dawn and repeats. It is important to recognize that the cyclic day blend is not just an abstraction. There is new stuff in the blend that is not in any of the individual days in the mental web to which the blend can be applied. Indeed, almost no blend consists exclusively of structure that is equally shared by all the mental spaces upon which the blend draws.

Pre-Christian Myths and Christian Sagas

The skaldic kennings mentioned above are not only illustrations of creativity and cultural diversity, and its realization in the specific Norse context, but also examples of the cognitive operation of blending and the kinds of conceptual compression that commonly result from blending. Let us take the arm-kenning

"mountain of the bow" (*fjall boga*) as an example and explain it with the help of the main terminology of Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending theory. One input to the blend is the mental space with the mountain, a protruding structure; another is the mental space with the bow and the person holding it. By connecting the inputs from the two concepts "mountain" and "bow," we get the blended space of the "arm" by compressing the form of the mountain into something protruding in the landscape and selectively processing its form into the body-part that protrudes to hold the bow, i.e., the arm, to produce the blend. Just as the mountain protrudes from the earth, so does the arm protrude from the body to carry the bow. The physiology of the arm – in this case as something protruding – is thus projected from the characteristics of a mountain, as protruding in the landscape.

Another unique blend in Old Norse literature is that of pre-Christian myths and Christian frameworks of mind, resulting in genres such as the Old Norse sagas written by Christian authors, two to three hundred years after the Christianization of Norway and Iceland. In her article "Old Norse Myth and Cognition," Margaret Clunies Ross focuses on the function of Old Norse myths in Christian stories and argues that the organization principles in the myths may be related to the organization principles of the Christian stories, both of which reflect cognitive mental frames of the Christian writers (Clunies Ross 2017). One may of course debate, and Clunies Ross comments on that, as to what came first – the organization of the Old Norse myths in Christian stories or Christian frameworks of mind conditioning the remembrance of pre-Christian myths to suit their own purposes. In any case, Clunies Ross argues that in the Christian narratives, "the Scandinavian gods themselves, who are not represented as omnipotent, function as human surrogates and their dealings with both the world of nature and with the giants, who represent the Other, encode fundamental human activities and interests" (Clunies Ross 2017, 50). John Lindow has argued similarly, without referring to cognitive blending and compression, in his article "Bloodfeud and Scandinavian Mythology." He argues that the centrality of the blood feud between gods and giants in Old Norse myths is also fundamental to the behavior patterns of the society that recorded the mythology (Lindow 1994).

Many other examples may be given of blending, compressing, and decompressing of pre-Christian elements in Christian stories, or vice versa. The "liquid knowledge" metaphor, like other metaphors in Old Norse literature, may be characterized by a high degree of plasticity, as it is meaningful in both pre-Christian and Christian contexts (Quinn 2010; Eriksen 2018). It is reminiscent of other common conceptual metaphors for the mind, such as "mental processing as ingestion" (we need to digest the content of books); "food for thought"; or "the mind is a container" (Harbus 2012, 25). Another example:

Literary descriptions of the pre-Christian settlement include allusions to the reaching of paradise-like lands (Wellendorf 2010). Such a description may be seen as a blend within the mind of the Christian author, who had different inputs: the history of the settlement of Iceland transmitted orally over time and a formative Christian story of traveling towards the earthly paradise and ultimately the heavenly Paradise. The two stories are compressed in the blend of the settlement of the paradise-like Iceland, which had its specific significance and cultural connotations in Old Norse literature during times of political and environmental challenges. These examples demonstrate how Old Norse authors blended stories of the past and knowledge of pre-Christian myths, with present needs, and aspirations for the future, by using flexible cognitive frames. Such story-making processes incorporate powerful and flexible compressions that arise through blending.

The Conception of a Stable Self

Now consider the self. We construct a personal sense of self, a stable identity that undergoes change. Actually, we can construct different personal senses of self, depending on what mental web is active in our brains and what is brought to mind by our circumstances, and despite these differences, we can still feel that, although we were different just a few minutes ago, the self we happen to be right now is utterly stable.

Cultures ferociously support, maintain, and enforce such blended conceptions of an abiding self. Cultures invest a great deal of language in providing fixed names for the personal self in the blend. The name counts as a linguistic invariant, something that does not change, regardless of how it is pronounced, declined, or written, so as to indicate the culture's insistence that there is a stable referent, a person.[3] Who am I? What a strange idea! If it does not seem so, it is because we are "thinking inside the blend."

The concept of an abiding self is necessary for great ranges of cultural conception: we punish someone for something that a previous self did; we grant that someone is qualified because a previous self underwent training and received a degree; we view two people as married, and apply consequential laws to them accordingly, because of something that two previous selves underwent.

3 On the use of personal name in the naming of buildings, see Bauer's contribution in this volume.

Since blending is a dynamic and highly creative activity, our blended concept of self can and does vary. That concept needs to be stable, but not fixed. Cultures offer patterns, often quite different patterns, for achieving stable but flexible selves, in stories that stretch across time, space, causation, and agency. Much of the job of the historian is to explore the specific details of those cultural offerings. Cultures also offer consolation, grievance, therapy, redemption, and a host of other varieties of help to the mentally turbocharged human beings trying to achieve and maintain such conceptions of self and such stories. Much of the job of the historian is to explore the specific details of that cultural system of help and support.

Strong rituals, such as the celebration of birthdays, are invented by cultures to magnify and increase the analogical connections over time.

The existence of the blended self does not obliterate the rest of the mental web. We are not deluded: on the contrary, the blend for the self helps us manage the extraordinary amount of stuff in the rest of the mental web, the vast ranges of time, space, causation, and agency, which otherwise would lie beyond our cognitive powers to grasp, explore, and manipulate. The blend may have a unified self even though two given input mental spaces in the mental web contain quite different selves, even aggressively opposed selves, and even though the time relation between those selves spans many years.

Cultures need not only stable selves in manageable stories but also stable selves in manageable stories of the future. We construct mental stories of our futures – plans, proposals, warnings, forecasts – individually and collectively. To imagine futures that differ importantly from our pasts is an astonishingly creative human mental feat: we have no experience of those futures whatsoever and must build them out of present conceptions, knowledge, memories, and experiences, using story and blending. It seems to us relatively straightforward and uncomplicated to imagine stories of the future; they seem to "come to mind." But in fact, nearly all the cognitive work performed to conceive these global stories occurs in backstage cognition in ways much too complicated for consciousness to hold or view. What we see in consciousness are some of the products, not the labor of the vibrant backstage operations. The resulting dynamic, overarching imagined stories of futures are neither fully detailed nor arbitrarily structured. Rather, they consist of compressed blends with constrained narrative structures, relying on certain patterns of conceptual compression that recur so strongly as to be mentally difficult to escape. Receivers must unpack or decompress those tight narrative blends to achieve a fuller understanding.

Thoughts of the future begin with the present. Concepts, memories, knowledge, and mental operations are all processes taking place exclusively in the present. There is no window in time through which zephyrs of the past or future

can blow; different moments in history do not actually intersect, although it seems that way to us when we "remember." Animals – including us – live, think, and feel in the here and now. Living, thinking, and feeling depend on biological and neurobiological events that take place in the present. When we think about the past or the future, or anything distant or outside our present situation, the thinking and feeling themselves are not distant at all – they are right here, right now, present, confined to our local, human-scale situation, conducted through here-and-now mental systems. The sweep of human thought is vast, arching over time, space, causation, and agency.

Developing shared cultural stories of our futures, involving our abiding selves, requires Blended Classic Joint Attention (BCJA) (Turner 2015, 2017).[4] In joint attention, a few people, in face-to-face conversation, in the same time, space, and ground, attend to something jointly and communicate about it, such as a blackbird in a hedge with a red stripe on its wing. The participants not only know that they are jointly attending but also know that they are engaged with each other through joint attention, and everyone in the group knows that they know all this. Classic joint attention is widely recognized as fundamental to human learning and cooperation. Human beings are distinctive for their advanced capacities for joint attention, but they also push it far forward through conceptual blending. Blending allows us to understand vast conceptual networks that do not fit classic joint attention in the least by using the idea of classic joint attention as only one input to a blended idea that inherits from many other conceptual inputs. The result of this blending is texts, art, sermons, literature, personal letters, and so on. Much of the job of people in a culture is to use blended classic joint attention to develop blended stories of their pasts and futures, involving stable, flexible, abiding selves. Different cultures will take quite different paths in the specific details of accomplishing this job,

4 "Joint attention" is a term in psychology for when a group of people feel that they are interacting with each other by attending to something. There might be many of them, and they do not need to communicate at all for it to count as joint attention. Imagine that we are all at an air show and jet fighters fly overhead, and we look up. In that moment, we imagine that others are looking up, and that they are imagining that we are looking up. We think that they know that we are imagining that they are looking up. And we all know all of this: we feel that we are in a scene of joint attention. But we do not need to be communicating. "Classic joint attention" is a term coined by Mark Turner for the situation when a few people who share the same ground, the same circumstances of local time and space, etc., feel that they are engaging with each other by attending to something in their perceptual environments and communicate about it, even if only minimally. Blended classic joint attention results when the scene of classic joint attention is blended with other inputs to create a scene that is not actually classic joint attention but is partly structured by it.

but they all work with the same mental operations, and the same imperative to offer patterns for stable selves in a stable culture.

Accepting Christianity – The Past and the Future in the Now

The abiding and, at the same time, unstable self is certainly traceable in Old Norse literature. The stable, flexible cultures that such stable, flexible selves need are also traceable in the corpus. Such cultures operate institutions that create predictability and that make sure that change is manageable, tractable, flexible but stable. One of the grandest cultural transformations during the Middle Ages in Scandinavia, and the whole of Europe, was the acceptance of Christianity as a formal religion. In Norway and Iceland, the political process of Christianization occurred in different ways, but in both contexts, it was a quick and at times violent process. The cultural internalization of Christian frameworks of mind was a very different, much longer process. In order for such a huge transformation to be accepted and acknowledged, institutions, rituals, common rules, and norms had to be created, and made intelligible to the community. The medieval individuals and selves, on their own behalf, had to maintain the sense of self both during the quick political process, and also during the long acculturation period. Accepting Christianity entailed dealing with the necessity for continuation and/or change of practices in the here and now; concern with the fate of past non-Christian relatives; and establishing an individual imagination based on the common aim for future salvation in the heavenly Jerusalem together with other Christian souls. Many Old Norse narratives about Christianization account for simultaneous concern for flexibility and stability in relation to the past, in the present, and towards the future. Two Old Norse dialogues about the dynamics between the body and the soul may serve as an example here. The first dialogue is a translation of the Old French poem *Un Samedi par nuit*, preserved in the Old Norse Homily Book from *c*. 1220 (AM 619 4to), while the second dialogue is a translation of Hugh of Saint Victor's *Soliloquium de arrha animae*, preserved in the Icelandic manuscript Hauksbók, from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Even though both dialogues are translations, they may be read and interpreted as products of their new Norse target-context, blending elements introduced by their European source texts with local Norse cultural horizons, as promoted by the contention in contemporary translation theory (Toury 1995; Eriksen 2016).

The narratives in both dialogues occur after the death of an individual, when the soul leaves the body and the two engage in a dialogue. The individuals in the two dialogues are thus two different blends of the concepts of body

and soul. Through a conversation in the here-and-now of the narrative, both dialogues include sections on how the body and the soul have interacted in the past, while the individual was alive, and on the prognosis concerning the future of the soul. The dynamics of the two conversations vary enormously, which demonstrates that though Old Norse culture had a "stable" idea of the blend between body and soul, there were variations in the dynamics between them. Culture, after all, provides choices, but it is not completely limiting.

The first dialogue is distinctly accusing and blaming in tone, as the soul addresses past wrongs done by the body; the soul blames the body for their miserable present state; and the soul experiences a catastrophic end because of that, when demons drag her [the soul] away while she is screaming in terror:

> En i þvi como fiandr ok toko hana á braut ok báru hana sva u-þyrmilega sem vargar marger bera sauð æin. En hon øpte ascrámlega. en þat stoðaðe henne ecci. þvi at dómr hennar vár þa loken. (Indrebø 1931, 153)

> [And at this moment the devils came and carried her [the soul] away and carried her as roughly as a pack of wolves drags away a sheep. And she screamed in terror, but it did not help her, as her judgement had been delivered.] (My translation)

The second dialogue has the same narrative frame: a soul leaving the body after death. The dialogue proceeds in a very different way, however. The body and the soul are, this time, compassionate and generous towards each other, they share responsibility, they are attentive to each other, and they perceive each other's viewpoints, and respond to them accordingly. It may be said that the body and the soul have a blended classic joint attention towards knowledge, truth, and God, an ability that they maybe also had in the previous dialogue, but which was not realized there. In Hauksbók, the body proclaims:

> Nv hvat er þu talar, þa vil ek heyra, nema ok mer i nyt fœra, þvi at eigi er rett at hafa eyrað til nytrar, kenningar, en hiartað i oðrvm stað, litið dvgir eyrað, ef hvgrinn reikar, þvi at sva mæler prophetinn við gvð sialfan.
> (Eirikur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson 1892–96, 460–1)

> [Now, whatever you are saying, I want to hear, learn, and use it appropriately, as it is not right to have ears for useful lessons, and the heart in another place; hearing is worth little, if thought wavers, as this is what the prophet preaches with God Himself.]
> (My translation)

Read together, these two texts account for stable, but potentially flexible selves making choices within a stable, but flexible culture. The stability of the culture is defined by the stability of the Christian ideal that a life without sin leads to salvation and eternity with God. The culture is, however, also flexible, as it allows for variations in the actual scenarios. The selves in the two

respective dialogues are stable and flexible in their own ways. The stability comes from the predictability of the consequences – sinful life leads to hell, while humility and willingness to look for and see God, leads to God. The first self may be said to show flexibility and creativity, but it is less prone to relate to this very predictable framework and thus makes "bad" choices that are punished; while the second self demonstrates cognitive and emotional adaptability to the set Christian ideal. Both souls understand and are conscious of the conceptual framework imposed by Christianity, but they make use of the potential for flexibility differently by making different choices that condition the existence of their future selves.

Flexibility Theory and Making Choices

As reviewed in chapter 4 of Turner (2014), the basic mental operation of conceptual blending allows us to construct in any moment an idea of self. Turner and McCubbins (2018) analyze ways in which blending results not in static selves but instead highly dynamic and flexible selves. They call this analysis of how flexible selves make choices "Flexibility Theory." McCubbins, McCubbins, and Turner (forthcoming) extend that analysis.

The possible inputs to the conceptual blend of a self are very many, including memories of previous selves, ideas of other selves such as friends and acquaintances, and selves which we have encountered through reports, news, books, fiction, songs, movies, fairytales, or generic conceptions of character. Activation of ideas is highly variable in the brain; the potential inputs vary moment to moment. Projection to the blend is highly selective, and emergent meaning can develop in the blend. If Bill and Peter, brothers-in-law, are quite happy in their jobs, Bill can nonetheless think that he would himself be miserable if he were Peter, because Bill is a night owl who lives in the Eastern Time Zone but Peter is a stockbroker who lives in the Pacific Time Zone, so Peter must arise at 5:30am Pacific Time to be ready for the opening of the stock market at 9:30am Eastern Time, and Bill would hate that. Now there is a new person in the blend, Bill-as-Peter, who is miserable, even though misery is not in any of the inputs.

The pattern of blending supporting this conception of a self in a moment is extremely common. There are analogies and disanalogies across all the different selves one has been, in reality or imagination. The analogies are compressed in the blend into an identity, and the disanalogies are compressed into change for that identity. It is the same compression pattern that we use when we say, somewhat inaccurately, that "dinosaurs turned into birds," or "the fences get

taller as you drive West across the United States," or "his girlfriend gets younger every year." The resulting idea, in the blend, of a stable self is an extremely useful and fit illusion, one strongly supported, even required, by cultures.

To count as a normal person, we must constantly manage our viewpoint and focus. The mental web for the distributed self is very large and offers us many places in which to situate our viewpoint and focus. This work is almost always unconscious. We can move an old, familiar viewpoint into the present self by blending.

The view of self in game theory is theoretically weak because it assumes moment-to-moment consistency in the individual making the choices. It does not take account of the effect of the overarching blended self, which can be stable in the blend despite considerable inconsistency across the various selves in all the input mental spaces.

Blending to create ideas is anything but a free-for-all. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) explore many constraints and limitations on blending and argue that nearly all attempts at blending take place out of consciousness and fail almost immediately. Very few survive, and of those, fewer become conscious and fewer still are selected for preservation by a community. What is needed for a self is not the straight-jacket internal consistency but rather, as Engel (2005) argues, sufficient predictability for collective action. That is a high bar, one with which, as Engel reviews, cultures struggle.

Consider someone who wants to pick up a coffee cup. There might be many ways to do so, even in the same situation. The human brain may be running many of those approaches simultaneously. One of those possibilities will precipitate, very briefly, in the moment of action. But that does not mean that the brain was trained on and focused on that one action suite; it means only that, in the moment of action, one coherent action was executed. There is no reason to expect that the precipitation of one of the conflicting possibilities in a brief moment of action indicates that the same precipitate of action would happen the next moment, in the same circumstances.

What a human being needs is a sense, at each point of action, of what the self is, and what choice can be made that will take the self to the next point. The self at the next point is not randomly different, but always a different self. Uniqueness, stasis, rigidity are not the same as consistency.

Consider another example of this same general pattern of finding a coherent path from point to point, choosing at each point. A small group of colleagues get together at a professional meeting. They decide that they want to do something together as a group. Not knowing the town very well, none of them has much information about what choices they will find as they venture out. What a person in this group needs to know is how to choose at any given point. At any point, much

as when one is looking at a map in a museum, he needs to construct a wayfinding marker: You Are Here Now. Or perhaps he constructs many, and one precipitates. The chooser needs to be a wayfinder in this scene. Such a scene would be modeled in the specific discipline known as game theory by analyzing the Players, Actions available to them, Information available to them, Payoffs, and Outcomes, to determine their Strategies and hence the Equilibrium Paths, if they exist, through the game tree. But this game-theoretic analysis assumes that the Players have ranked, fixed, known preferences that remain consistent throughout the game, and as Turner and McCubbins (2018) have shown, that is not a tenable assumption for the analysis of the construction of selves and their choices: not only does the chooser not need to understand the scene as a game, it is not even clear that it can be modeled as a game.

Flexibility Theory views choosers as wayfinders. At each point along the way, the person may be flexibly different from the preceding self, and flexibly inhabiting a different story, a story that is a modification of the one the person originally inhabited. The possibility space of these alternative selves is large; it includes a range of on-deck alternatives; but one self precipitates in the instant when the choice must actually happen.

Flexibility Theory seems to be compatible with the view of human mental operation that is emerging from recent advances in cognitive neuroscience. The field of cognitive neuroscience is in its infancy, and the current view is speculative, but it presents four new perspectives that support a shift to a different framework for studying human decision- making. (1) Even when human beings are engaged in no task, the brain is highly active, and constantly composing matrices of stories and selves. These are largely intrinsically driven and not responses to external stimuli. (See, e.g., Kaplan et al. 2016.) (2) This constant imagination is not computation, and it is only occasionally tied to external stimuli. (3) Common-sense notions of the mind, largely inherited by the discipline of psychology, begin with a list of common-sense elements, like fear, greed, hope, ambition, belief, desire, procrastination, abstraction, and so on. Cognitive neuroscience is presently reconsidering from scratch what might be the "neuroscientifically relevant human psychological factors." Thinking about the mind does not have to begin from such a common-sense taxonomy. (See Anderson 2014 for a review.) Alas, these common-sense taxonomies are enshrined in our everyday vocabularies, and just as theory of evolution, of biochemistry, and of quantum mechanics had to invent new concepts and vocabulary to advance science, so it may be that new vocabulary must be invented for discussing selves, minds, and choices. Spivey (2008), for example, talks of selves as continuous dynamical systems that move through multi-dimensional conceptual landscapes, at times precipitating into this or that

attractor basin in the landscape but moving through it. This is not everyday vocabulary for how people choose. (4) Cognitive neuroscientists promote the dynamical nature of cognition as the human brain is constantly scanning over a range of often-conflicting alternatives and collapsing that range to an action only in the moment of decision (Spivey 2008).

Change and Decision-Making Over Time

Wayfinding is constant, and at different moments, even presented with the same choices, we may chose differently depending on our changing epistemologies and experiences. Above we looked at two examples of how two selves relate their presents, pasts, and future differently, through making different choices, in the same stable predictable culture. In a final example from the Old Norse corpus, we will see something else, namely how one individual changes his mind, how different moments and contexts trigger the same individual to make different choices, how individuals are not always necessarily consistent, but that sufficient predictability is necessary for a choice to make sense socially.

The example is from one of the Icelandic thirteenth-century Sagas of Icelanders, *Njáls saga*, and concerns the choices made by Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi and their consequences for his life. For readers who are not well acquainted with the plot of *Njáls saga*, I refer to Miller's (2014, 8–13) concise summary. Other readers would know that when Gunnarr's situation gets more tense and there is a serious risk of real difficulties, Gunnarr gets two very clear pieces of advice from his loyal friend Njáll, namely, not to kill twice in the same family, and if this should happen, to obey the formal decision about settlement made at the *Alþing*. This is the recipe for survival, and one would think that it is a clear and easy enough recipe to follow. The events progress as they do, and as expected, Gunnarr does end up killing twice in the same family line. He is outlawed and sentenced to leave the country for three years. At first, Gunnarr seems to reluctantly obey the settlement – he prepares to leave, makes his goodbyes, and is almost on his way. Then the well-known moment occurs, when he falls off his horse, looks at the beautiful hills around, and "wakes up" from his own almost automatic state of conformity and obedience. He changes his mind and decides to stay at home, knowing that this choice would most probably cost him his life. And it does. In other words, Gunnarr's choice is not sufficiently predictable in his social space, and people, his enemies have no understanding of his choice, nothing can legitimize such a choice in the community with its specific judicial norms and rules. In the saga, Gunnarr's choice seems inspired by the beautiful surroundings that seem to trigger an internal process. For Gunnarr, his choice is

obviously both logical and worthwhile, and it may be explained with reference to his sense of belonging to his home, or his pride and reluctance to flee.

In the moment of choice, Gunnarr's actions are for him coherent. For Gunnarr, his blended self is stable despite considerable inconsistency with his previous self's decision to actually leave, to save his life, and to satisfy his friends' and enemies' expectations. He is stable, but flexible, and his choices about one and the same issue change depending on the moment. Gunnarr's unintelligible choice to stay may be seen as the product of his brain scanning the range of all available alternatives and collapsing that range to an action only in the moment of decision. Does Gunnarr have an aim with his decision, and does he seem to find a coherent path to his destined aim? Based on his happiness when he is observed in his own mound, after his death, looking at the moon and reciting skaldic verses, it seems that he has reached a desired destination. Of course, in the stanza he recites from the mound, he is urging his relatives to take vengeance for his death, which may suggest that his mental blend include some imaginations and aspirations for the future, even after his own death. He knows what his choice entails, the consequences will be hard, but it is still the right choice. Even though Gunnarr is flexible, society is not. Society, or his enemies, punish Gunnarr for his previous crimes, and they do not leave his flexible decision-making without consequences.

From a cognitive perspective, this may be seen as an example of the self having agency and making choices. Cristof Engel's (2005) proposal is that cultural institutions are established to create predictability. Knowledge of the cultural institutions gives choices to individuals, but not enslavement. Cultural institutions are also temporary: they change because people do different things, they innovate. Indeed, cognitively, modern human beings are so highly creative and innovative that the central problem for human beings is how to generate just enough of the kind of predictability that makes cooperation even possible. But creativity and innovation have to be done in an effective way to be accepted. If it is not done effectively, culture would kill or imprison those who present a threat to minimal predictability. This is what happens to Gunnarr because of his not sufficiently predictable choice.

Summary and Conclusion

The aim of this article is to investigate whether the overall approaches of cognitive sciences and the humanities, and more specifically Old Norse studies, may be seen as complementary. We have discussed and exemplified four main

aspects of culture and the self: cultural diversity; creation of stories and blending; the conception of the stable self; and cognitive premises for choice-making. The cognitive scientist has accounted for the cognitive premises for these aspects, while the Old Norse scholar has looked for traces of these cognitive principles in the Old Norse literary corpus.

The examples from Old Norse poetic and literary tradition show that (1) what has been seen as unique for skaldic poetry may also be seen as cultural variation in the way a universal cognitive pattern is realized; (2) the creation of stories entails compressing and decompressing of flexible frames, and filling them with new content blends; (3) ideas of stable selves over time, space, causation, and agency are also conceptualized in Old Norse tradition, even though the link between the present, past, and future is flexible and is thought of and played out differently by different selves; and (4) decision-making is a process of wayfinding, and illogical choices may be seen as cognitive creativity and innovation, but still upholding the sense of a stable self. If choices are not sufficiently predictable, however, they remain socially incomprehensible and are punished by cultural institutions.

The synergy between the two fields is apparent. Through studying various cultures, texts, and languages, cognitive scientists can discuss the premises for existence of culture, language, literature, and poetics: What aspects of the brain make culture, language, literature, and poetics possible? How is predictability and cultural variation possible? The cognitive scientist may see skaldic poetry and its kennings, or Old Norse myths, and other texts, as reflections of common cognitive frames that structure human existence.

Humanities scholars, in this case Old Norse scholars, on the other hand, may use the insight from cognitive sciences to lift our glances from the uniqueness and peculiarities of our material and discuss how it relates to other cultural expressions. This may of course also be done through more traditional comparative literary analysis, but with the help of cognitive sciences we can better understand the cognitive premises for its creation, existence, continuity, and discontinuity. Comparative literary or cultural studies have indeed demonstrated that Old Norse textual culture, with its uniqueness and peculiarities, is still inseparable from the rest of European literary heritage, religious and secular, in Latin and in the vernacular. Cognitive sciences, however, demonstrate commonness in a different way, without downplaying uniqueness, and help us understand why cultural variation happens in the first place, across cultural contexts, but also within the same cultural context. From a cognitive perspective, all humans use the basic set of (mental) tools, but nonetheless build different "houses," or cultures, all the time. In other words, although cultures make all kind of unique cultural expressions, they are all a product of the human

mind and its working. Further, cognitive sciences may help us see our own interpretations as cognitive patterns and explain why all the various interpretations are possible at one and the same time. Contrasting interpretations of the same material in the humanities are not necessarily exclusive of one or other. Rather, they may be seen as reflecting basic cognitive categories, such as opposition, inversion, or different contextualization.

Of course humanities scholars, including scholars of Old Norse literary culture, have pointed out, without deploying cognitive theory, that the production of any texts, original composition, oral or written, translation, or even copying texts in manuscript culture is the result of a hermeneutical process, where something old and something new are mixed to fit a new target context (Copeland 1991; Eriksen 2014). The cognitive perspective adds to such interpretative disciplines, by explaining not only the centrality of the hermeneutical and creative process for human creation, story-making, and blending, but also by emphasizing that culture-creation in itself is a core evolutionary invention of cognitively modern human beings.

Humanities scholars are usually deeply concerned with the meaning of a text, a linguistic expression, or a piece of artwork, etc. Cognitive scientists, on the other hand, would ask why this text, language, art is there in the first place. In cognitive sciences, producing meaning is seen as a habit: the most important variable is thus not the meaning in itself, but the cognitive process behind it. This is valid for the creator behind a medieval text, the text's medieval readers, and the contemporary scholar working on this same medieval text. The meaning that is created reflects cognitive categories in the human mind, and it is also rooted in its own cultural context. Interest in the premises of creation and interpretation therefore go hand in hand with textual and cultural interpretations. What connects them is the cognition of the creator / interpreter. As human cognition has essentially been the same for the past 50,000 years, being aware of the cognitive categories that structure the way we find meaning may help us see various interpretations of medieval material in relation to each other.

The cognitive scientist studies the universal, not by disregarding the cultural peculiarities and complexities, but rather based on the cultural peculiarities and complexities. The universal is studied based on the unique and the individual, or more precisely, based on many unique and individual examples. Studying the universal is thus not the same as studying the collective. Plurality, including polarity and duality, are used to understand and make sense of how the brain structures human existence. Cognitive science looks for what unifies the fragments – a man can understand a female pain because of empathy, or a protestant can study medieval catholic culture – while the humanities may easily (but luckily

not always) focus on the dualities and oppositions between genders, religions, cultures. The nuances between the two traditions are hugely important, but they also illustrate the overlapping concerns and complementary potential.

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The Precarious Self

Abstract: At any given moment, a person is defined by a set of resources that enable him to act and intervene in his own fate, to take control of his future, and to formulate his goals. His resources and his goals in turn define a horizon of affordances – possible actions that have become salient and impinge on his awareness as choices he can meaningfully make at that moment. Deploying this theoretical starting point, this article focuses on the saga about the Norwegian king Sverrir Sigurðarson and analyses the self's endless ability to perceive promising possibilities and available affordances. The close reading of *Sverris saga* reveals how king Sverrir has an unusual capacity for perceiving possibilities, how he successfully exploits and navigates all the options available to him, no matter how remote his chances are, but how at the end of his reign he is unable to escape the consequences of the precarious self.

Keywords: affordances, affordance pretence, agent system, agent pretence, cognition, cognitive capacities, conceptual integration, blending, dreams, evolutionary psychology, *kostir*, or options, narrative structure, play, placeholder self, possibility space

In the winter of 1199, King Sverrir held parliament in Nidaros, making a case to the *þingmen* – all farmers – for building ships. His rival Nikolás Árnason, bishop of Oslo, had taken the town and castle the previous year, destroyed or taken all of Sverrir's ships in his absence, and crowned a child, claimed to be the son of the previous king. The bishop's rebel army – the Baglar – burned Bergen to the ground that summer, collected taxes, and raised conscripts in most of the southern and western parts of the country in the autumn, and were now raiding in the north, murdering the king's officials and supporters. According to the saga, Sverrir addresses the parliament with these words:

> "Þess er vís ván," sagði hann, "þegar er várar at Baglar munu stefna hingat í fiǫrðinn, ok munu þeir gera yðr mikinn ófagnað, því at þessi flokkr rænir yðr jafnan. En vér Birkibeinar erum nú skiplausir, sem þér vituð, ok ekki vel við látnir at verja fé yðart eða fjǫr. Megum vér ekki svá skjótt renna um landit it efra sem þeir róa it ytra. En nú þó at ydr þykki þetta vera nǫkkurr kostnaðr þá man hitt meira félátit er Baglar gera yðr."
>
> (*Sverris saga* 2007, 235)

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> ["We can expect with certainty," he said, "that as soon as spring arrives, the Baglar will sail hither into the fjord, and then they will inflict great harm on you, because this flock keeps robbing you. We Birkibeinar are now without ships, as you know, and incapable of protecting your goods or lives. We cannot run as fast inland through the country as they can row the outer way. If you think this will cost you something, the loss of goods from what the Baglar will do to you will be greater."] (My translation)

He makes no appeal to his status and authority as king. The farmers are open to this starkly pragmatic proposal, and Sverrir asks each district to be responsible for the cost of one ship, which is then agreed. At this point, King Sverrir has been excommunicated by one of his bishops, with the blessing of Pope Celestine III in Rome; that autumn, his successor Innocent III accused the king of promoting a forged document releasing him from the ban, placed Norway under interdict, and sent letters to neighboring kings to dispossess him of the throne. The pressure on the king is intense. His own claim to the throne was always tenuous; the son of a comb maker from the Faroe Islands, he was a complete outsider. His self-serving claim that he was a king's son was widely ridiculed, and he had repeatedly refused to undergo *járnburðr*,[1] or trial by fire, widely accepted as an incontestable proof of veracity – an ordeal that his purported ancestor Haraldr *gilli* had successfully undergone, as well as Sverrir's putative half-brother Eiríkr Sigurðsson. What counts for the Trønder, however, is whether he can deliver the services of a king (for a discussion, see Bagge 1996).

The reason *Sverris saga* is such a gripping tale is that his chances of success are so vanishingly miniscule and his repeated triumphs so exceedingly improbable. This is true not just at the outset, when he arrives in Norway, a nobody, to raise an army, but repeatedly throughout his pathetic yet brilliant campaign, with a tiny ragtag band of marginals and vagrants. Astonishingly, the cliffhangers continue right through his long reign, as he holds onto the crown by his nails, chronically unable to secure his grip on the whole kingdom. What draws us into this man's story is his uncanny ability to see a possibility of success where others see only certain failure, to navigate in the present and to coordinate others in such a way that they succeed against all odds, and to do so repeatedly and reliably: at turn after turn, you cannot believe he will succeed in pulling it off.

A man moves in a multidimensional state space where space and time are only two of the factors, a state space of possible actions and outcomes so vast that he cannot become cognizant of more than a tiny fraction of them. At any given moment, a person is defined by a set of resources that enable him to act and intervene in his own fate, to take control of his future, and to formulate his goals. His resources and his goals in turn define a horizon of affordances –

1 For a general discussion of trial by fire and water in the Middles Ages, see Bartlett (1986).

possible actions that have become salient and impinge on his awareness as choices he can meaningfully make at that moment. Judging by *Sverris saga*, the king is exceptionally skilled at perceiving, formulating, and communicating a wide range of potentially attractive affordances in any given situation. These are the numerous and repeated *kostir* or options that he proposes to his followers or to his opponents as possible ways forward, demonstrating a strikingly acute awareness of navigating life in a multifarious and complex possibility space. This skill lies at the heart of his success, and his remarkable ability to move forward in the face of unpromising situations and adverse conditions.

In the following, I develop a systematic and stepwise argument about the development of the cognitive capacities that underlie the human capacity to exploit concealed opportunities through the construction of a precarious self. The ability to perceive promising possibilities, I suggest, is the chief challenge and function of cognition, rooted in a series of complex and surprising cognitive operations with a deep evolutionary history. I then apply this conceptual framework to a reading of the first year of the saga's narrative, describing his swift rise to power, approaching the text as a cognitive scientist without a background in Norse historiography and literature. It is worth noting that Sverrir himself is portrayed as acutely aware of his unusual ability to perceive possibilities that others do not; this evidence of self-awareness in the saga makes him a rewarding and fascinating cognitive study.

On the Self as a Gateway to the Possible

Human beings are unique among animals in our ability to access and explore the possible. The possible must be distinguished from the imaginary or counterfactual, with which it only partially overlaps. What is possible is actual: it is actually the case that I can get up from my desk and walk to the window. The space of the possible is vast; manifest reality is only an infinitesimal fraction of it. At this very moment, you could straighten your right little finger while you look left and upwards, a simple action you may never have done before and may never do again; you could get up and start cooking one of many trillion possible meals; you could write a letter that begins or ends a friendship; you may suddenly realize the solution to a problem. What is possible is mostly junk: you could at this moment count to 13, or call a random number, or read this sentence backwards. Much of it is harmful: you could stick a finger in your eye, or bang your head against a wall, or cross the street blindfolded. Yet within the space of the possible is also located your future happiness, your next meal,

a good night's sleep, an unborn child. Navigating in these vast possibility spaces is the chief task of cognitive processes.

In physics, the space of the possible is called a state space. The state space of a pendulum is the sum total of all of the positions and states that a pendulum can occupy. Note that this state space is not a historical summation: whether the pendulum ever has occupied a particular state is not a factor in determining its state space. Rather, the intrinsic properties of the pendulum determine this state space and can be calculated from these properties. The different parts of the state space require different amounts of energy to access; the downward position of the pendulum is accessed with no added energy, others are accessed with a small push. If given a sufficiently strong push, Foucault's famous 28-kilo pendulum suspended from its 67-meter wire from the dome of the Panthéon in Paris could smash the dome itself – even though this will almost certainly never happen, it is part of its state space.

Living organisms navigate in their possibility spaces using metabolic energy. Variations in navigational behavior are governed at several levels: genetic, phenotypic, neuronal, semantic. Natural selection culls organisms that stray into the destructive parts of their possibility spaces, and allows those that only venture into the beneficial parts to thrive and reproduce. Darwinian evolution in this way slowly explores and expands the organism's possibility space, adding new structures and behaviors. Perceptual systems provide information not only about facts, but about possibilities: the absence of an obstacle implies the possibility of movement, the presence of a chemical gradient implies a possible food source.

It was the psychologist J. J. Gibson (1986, chapter 8) who first explicitly formulated the idea that vision has two distinct components: the perception of manifest facts and the perception of latent possibilities, or "affordances." An affordance is a perceived possibility of action. A bee may perceive a tree canopy as an affordance for gathering nectar from flowers, a bird as an affordance for making a nest, and a giraffe as an affordance for browsing. According to Gibson, the perception of affordances is strictly a function of the animal's physiology, which enables it to act in specific ways. In order to act successfully, you need an accurate sense of your body's capabilities. As Shel Silversteen (1964) explores in *The Giving Tree*, an apple tree may be perceived as having a wide range of affordances for a human being over the course of a lifetime: a child may see the tree as an affordance for climbing, while an old man may see the stump as an affordance for resting on.

Neuroscientists have since confirmed Gibson's distinction between the perception of facts, or percepts, and the perception of affordances, or possibilities of action. Anatomically, the object-processing pathway of the visual system

splits into a ventral object-processing stream, mediating percepts and visual object recognition, and a dorsal object-processing stream, mediating spatial analysis and affordances (Goodale and Milner, 1992; Ungerleider and Mishkin, 1982). The ventral stream gives rise to our conscious experience of the visual world: the trees, the room, a face. The task of the dorsal stream is to generate an awareness of possible actions. It doesn't have as obvious an output into the field of conscious awareness, but may generate a sense of freedom or constrained enclosure, an urge to move, to freeze, a movement to turn your head or grasp. The importance of the possible is built into our nervous system, deeply integrated into the architecture of the brain.

The reason for this is on the face of it obvious: we navigate the possible to survive and thrive. What is perhaps less intuitively obvious is how astronomically large our possibility spaces are. We can get a feel for this by considering the surprising logic of combinatorics. A monkey that knows how to walk, grasp, and jump can form six different action sequences, expressed mathematically as 3! (three factorial). By learning two more skills – say climbing and hanging from a branch – the number of sequences rises dramatically to 120 (5!). Add two more – say running and eating – and the behavioral sequences shoots up to 5,040 (7!). The numbers increase very fast as you add more elements to be combined. A simple deck of fifty-two playing cards can be arranged in 52! different ways – that's 80,658,175,170,943,878,571,660,636,856,403,766,975,289,505,440,883,277,824,000,000,000,000, a number so large that it's beyond astronomical, larger than the number of seconds since the Big Bang.[2] Note again that this means in practice that most sequences have never happened; every time you shuffle a deck of cards you create a sequence that has likely never occurred before. The possible is largely unexplored.

The permutations of an ordinary deck of cards, its four suits a ludicrously simplified representation of four royal houses, is clearly not an adequate proxy for the real complexity of life. Every moment in a human life has many more than fifty-two elements that can be sequenced at will, creating possibility spaces that are infinitely larger. These spaces are not only a potential for events that are concealed from us; they are more radically unknown unknowns, events that have never been imagined and never happened. Even if most of what is possible is useless or harmful, the space of the possible also contains the uniquely valuable, diamonds in the coal mine.

2 See https://boingboing.net/2017/03/02/how-to-imagine-52-factorial.html (accessed April 17, 2020).

In most animals, the perception of affordances is largely constrained by a temporal window so narrow we may call it the present. A female cheetah may see an inattentive gazelle as affording a meal, an affordance that strengthens as she approaches him. In order to generate the correct affordance and accurately estimate the likelihood of a successful capture, the cheetah must learn not only how fast the gazelle reacts and runs when alerted, but how fast she herself can accelerate (typically, to 75km/h in two seconds), how fast she can run, and for how long. Constructed in part by past experience, in part by the immediate awareness of the body, this proprioceptive or self-sensing self opens up and constrains the envelope of affordances or possible actions; for instance, if a paw has a splinter, the cheetah will leave the hunt to others in her coalition, and she will still share in the kill.

Yet the affordances visible to the proprioceptive self risks trapping the animal in a routine that makes it excessively predictable. Organisms that rely exclusively on known successful strategies may find that they become too predictable to their pathogens and other adversaries; what used to work after a while no longer does. Sex scrambles genetic sequences to stay ahead, but in mammals natural selection has also generated a spectacular set of cognitive adaptations to explore the possible. Accessing and discovering new strategies in this absolutely unbelievably large space that are actually useful is often not only a promising opportunity; it may be a requirement for survival. Since these are unknowns located in unknown spaces, nature has generated a host of surprising and creative strategies to open up and explore the coal mine of the possible in search for diamonds of successful action.

Prominent among these are dreams and play, adaptations that date back at least to early mammals. Stickgold proposed the dreaming mind is "looking for unexpected, novel and potentially highly creative and useful connections that otherwise we would not notice" (Young 2000; cf. Stickgold 2000), and Tononi and Cirelli (2016) demonstrated that synaptic connections between neurons are weakened during slumber. Dreams may function to weaken the familiar order of labels, objects, and events, readying them for new combinatorial sequences, relations, and actions in the waking state. In play, the perception of affordances can be recruited for a surprising purpose: to simulate and train skills (Steen and Owens 2001). A cat can treat a ball of yarn as if it were a mouse, a child can run away from her father as if he were a monster. This affordance pretense provides the cat with a cheap and readily available opportunity to practice her hunting skills. In our ancestral environment, a child inept at escaping from predators would have a high chance of being killed. The problem faced by mammalian juveniles, including human children, is that their skills are built through practice: if at first you don't succeed, you try and try again. However,

for some dangerous situations you do not get a second chance – once the predator turns up, it is too late to practice. Play solves this seemingly intractable problem: to be an expert at something the very first time it happens. Play allows you to move into the present a scenario you need to be prepared for in the future, simulating an encounter that has not yet happened, and building the skills required to survive (Steen and Owens 2001).

In affordance pretense, the criteria for accepting something as an affordance are relaxed, allowing the player to simulate an ancestrally recurring problem while maintaining the proprioceptive self. Humans appear to be unique in their ability to extend play into the construction of the self itself, in agent pretense. Children will pretend to be cheetahs, adopting some of their characteristics in a creative blend: living in trees, hunting deer, protecting cubs. Agent pretense involves an intuitive grasp of narrative structure: an agent with certain resources and a horizon of goals, a set of obstacles, strategies for overcoming these obstacles. Humans can map themselves onto fictive characters in stories, taking on their qualities and goals (Steen 2005). In its playful operations, agent pretense dramatically expands the scope of affordance pretense: a table can become a landing pad for an astronaut's space mission, a gesture can become a material anchor for the wolf that speaks to you as Little Red Riding Hood. The pretend self is a conceptual integration, inheriting some features from your own proprioceptive self and blending them with selected features from the other self to generate an emergent narrative structure (for an exposition of conceptual integration, see Eriksen and Turner in this volume).

In reconstructing a blended narrative, agent pretense requires imagination – the ability to call up memories into waking consciousness. A surprising feature of the imagination is that it exceeds the possible. This spillover may be modality-specific: we may fail in the attempt to imagine an onion that tastes like chocolate. What is certain is that the visual imagination is spectacularly unconstrained by the possible: imagine an acorn lying in your hand, sprouting as you watch into a giant baobab tree with leaves that turn into the tongues of thousands of birds. No problem – however impossible. Deeper constraints of object design persist, but the impossible is no hindrance. The ability of the visual imagination to overflow the possible is a risky adaptation, exposing us to fantasies unmoored from reality. At the same time, an imagination constrained by what we already know to be possible would be less innovative: we need the unconstrained imagination to explore the larger field within which the unexpected and undiscovered possible is concealed. The ability to pretend to be someone else is in turn a powerful innovation that leverages the unconstrained characteristics of the imagination, giving us access to a new level of cognitive flexibility. It allows us to explore the world of

possible actions from novel perspectives, as a function of new sets of resources and new goals.

Agent pretense, the creation of a pretend or virtual self that blends your proprioceptive self with your understanding of another's life situation, is a core component of human play. A cat playing always remains a cat, tied to the capacities and interests of a cat. A human child will spontaneously map herself onto another, playfully adopting his gait, speech, and mannerisms, and pretend to be adults and perform grownup tasks, thus laying the foundation for skillful action. We call it 'imitation,' but this is a misnomer; it is a complex blend of the proprioceptive self and the other at the level of narrative structure. Indeed, a child may playfully use agent pretense to gain the cat's perspective on a piece of yarn, experience something of the cat's intent, infer something about the cat's narrative structure, enact being a cat, and practice and learn from its behaviors. By understanding the cat from a first-person perspective, the child gains the ability to engage and interact with it in its own world. In play, this construction is improvisational – the pretend self is established in a secure environment only and abandoned as soon as any real danger appears. It is like a bubble in a fast-flowing river, formed only to vanish and reappear, spectacular and evanescent. This precariousness of the pretense self is part of its attraction: it can be dropped in a heartbeat, yet while it is open it functions as a gateway to other worlds.

Neurobiological evidence indicates that autobiographical memories associated with a sense of self are handled by a distinct subsystem subject to selective failure (Tulving 1989; Hennig-Fast 2008; Steen 1998). The content of the self is contingent on the local situation a person is born into, but it is not fixed: the self is an arena of creativity and innovation. Goffman (1956) famously argued that life is theatrical: our social identities are formed, improvised, and performed like roles in a play. A corollary is that we can, should, and do have multiple functional selves, each tailored for the occasion.

In cognitive terms, the self has a narrative structure – that is to say, a self is the notion of an agent that is endowed with or has access to certain resources, is capable of formulating goals and strategies to reach them. A goal exists precisely in the liminal space of the possible: to be achievable, it must be realistic, or grounded in actuality, yet it exists as a potential rather than as a reality. By developing strategies, the agent of a narrative can plan complex sequences of actions that allow otherwise highly unlikely or improbable events to unfold, overcoming obstacles and arriving at the goal. In agent pretense, one can adopt a new identity, which is to say adopt a new set of assumptions about the resources, dispositions, and goals of the agent, leading to the formulation of new goals and new strategies. What makes this novel dimension of creativity possible is

what we may call a flexible agent system. It is a highly sophisticated innovation, an extension of affordance pretense that vastly expands the possibility space opened up in play.

The flexibility of the human agent system means that the organism's top-level control system is programmable. The perception of affordances, of the set of possible actions, is a function of the content of the agent system – that is to say, the skills and resources available to the agent, which in turn condition the agent's goals. In play, this agent definition can be dramatically changed: you can pretend to be a bird, spreading your wings and soaring over the sea, seeing the earth from above. As the imagination soars into the impossible, new areas of the possible nevertheless open up: a map routinely adopts the perspective of a bird, and imagining flight gives you surprising access to information about the affordances of air for flight. Mapping yourself onto other agents is a uniquely powerful vector for discovering useful features of the possibility space, especially if the organism you map yourself onto actually exits, since it has learned to exploit affordances in its environment that may also be accessible to you. Yet this programmable self also means that there is no definition of a true self that can be discovered; the self is a placeholder, a verb rather than a noun, a function rather than an essence. Your true being is the underlying potential; the manifest self is no more than foam in a vast ocean of possibilities.

Mapping your agent system imaginatively onto others allows you to understand them better and generate predictions about how they may act. By forming a pretend agent blending elements of yourself with elements of the other makes the narrative that animates the other more accessible to you, and you can use that information to cooperate or to compete more effectively. By projecting yourself onto virtual, pretend selves, you can simulate a social possibility space that depends on the beliefs and narratives held by others, exploring these affordances for your own action.

Over time, culture generates a repertoire of standardized and impersonalized pretend selves that are made available to all through art and storytelling. These function to structure the actions and aspirations of the individual, guiding him and her in tracks that are predictable and normatively endorsed. While cognitively grounded in play, these social roles often become part of relatively fixed social hierarchies. They become the nexus of a social struggle for resources, and its players lose track of the inescapable precariousness of the pretend self.

In these ways, the human mind has been constructed by natural selection over hundreds of thousands of years to gain access to useful affordances within the astronomically large possibility space that confronts us. The self that is formed by a proprioceptive awareness of the immediate capacities of the human body remains the foundation of action, but this sensory self on its own

is incapable of accessing more than a tiny portion of the useful possibility space. Early in the evolution of mammals, play evolves as a system for accessing useful possibilities of action through affordance pretense, allowing juveniles to practice complex skills in domains where the cost of failure is unacceptably high. Humans have learned to access additional promising dimensions of the possible by developing a playful pretend self that recruits the imagination, blending, and a flexible agent system. These cognitive capacities deal with state spaces so vast that we cannot have an intuitive grasp of their entirety; instead, we are blind sailors buffeted by waves catching winds that blow us towards the scent of pine in the distance, navigating a sea we cannot fathom.

The Pretender

Let us position ourselves at the start of Sverrir's adventure in 1176, when he arrives in Norway from the Faroes with nothing but a story to his name. Our main source of information for this moment is *Sverris saga*, which notes that the first part was written by Abbot Karl Jónsson of Þingeyraklaustur while "yfir sat sjálfr Sverrir konungr ok réð fyrir hvat rita skyldi" (King Sverrir himself sat over him and settled what should be written) (*Sverris saga* 2007, 3). His mother, the saga claims, had traveled to Rome, and in confession said that the father of her son was a king. This reached the ear of the Pope, who commanded she reveal this to her son. This is the story he brings with him to Norway: he is the son of King Sigurðr Haraldsson, called Sigurðr *munnr*. Neither his contemporaries nor subsequent historians have been able to demonstrate this claim to be definitively false. Its likelihood is a different matter; no details are supplied to enhance the credibility of the story.

Sigurðr *munnr* is a strategic choice of father: two of his illegitimate sons have already successfully claimed the throne. The boy king Hákon II Sigurðarson, known as Hákon *herðibreiðr*, was king of Norway from 1157 until 1162; in the spring of 1159, the twelve-year-old with his flock of lawless deplorables plundered the Møre coast; according to Snorri Sturluson, it was the first time in over 150 years that the land had been ravaged. Sigurðr Sigurðsson, his half-brother and also a young teen, succeeded him, and was proclaimed king at Øyrating in Nidaros in 1163, but was decapitated by King Magnús Erlingsson only months later (*Magnúss saga Erlingssonar* 1951, ch. 18). Magnús made no claim to be the son of a king, though his mother was the daughter of Sigurðr *Jórsalafari*; he made

a series of concessions to the Church and leaned on his powerful supporters, including the Danish king.

In the political landscape of 1176, Sverrir's opportunities were meager. Once a man has assessed his opportunities and formulated a distant goal, the challenge is to develop an understanding of the obstacles facing him in reaching that goal. This requires constructing a rich and accurate model of the world; only such a model will make it possible to develop new and effective strategies that marshal his limited resources effectively to achieve the goal. Sverrir had remarkable dreams, the saga tells us, but on his arrival, he lacked an understanding of the world he was about to engage with. He spent the first year gathering information while carefully concealing his intentions:

> Ok af sinni rœðu ok vitrleik gróf hann svá undir þeim at hann varð margra hluta þeira víss af þeim er þeir vildu eigi hafa í ljós látit ef þeir vissi hverr þar hefði verit eða við hvern þeir hǫfðu rœtt. (*Sverris saga* 2007, 11)

> [By prudent speech and craftiness he dug below them and became assured of many matters which they would never have disclosed if they had known who was among them or with whom they conversed.] (My translation)

He learned that opposition to Magnús Erlingsson centered in Trøndelag, where the Birkibeinar crowned Eysteinn *meyla* Eysteinsson as their king at Øyrating in Nidaros. Eysteinn claimed to have been the son of Eysteinn Haraldsson, Sigurðr *munnr's* half-brother and co-regent. This left little room for Sverrir; the major players were all committed. Finding no base in Norway, he followed Eysteinn *meyla's* example and sought support in Sweden, where Sigurðr *munnr's* daughter Brigit was married to the Swedish earl Birgir *brosa*. The Swedes, at war with the Danes, had an interest in a friendly Norwegian king, but had already committed their support to Eysteinn. By the time Sverrir had continued his journey in the winter of 1177 to Värmland – and to meet King Sigurðr's second daughter Cecelia – he learned that the Birkibeinar had just lost a battle against Magnús in Viken and Eysteinn was dead. With the help of his putative Swedish kin, he was proclaimed the new leader of the Birkibeinar.

In this way, Sverrir positioned himself optimally in what had appeared to be a hopeless situation – that is to say, a situation in which there was no realistically possible path to the throne. He was lucky, we might say, implying that he could not have known beforehand that Eysteinn, with the nickname "*meyla*" or "little girl," would fail as the leader of the Birkibeinar and soon perish in battle. Yet luck is clearly not the whole story; of the infinitude of possible actions that Sverrir could have engaged in after his arrival in Norway, he very deliberately selects one particular horizon of possibilities that he correctly conjectures might allow him to position himself within striking distance of the throne. His developing

understanding of the situation suggested to him that the most promising path to the throne lay through Sigurðr's sisters and their connections among the Swedish noblemen to the Birkibeinar faction and their base in Trøndelag. Sverrir's actions are informed by a mental model of the contemporary political situation, enriched by his initial information gathering. He models not only the facts, but the potential actions and outcomes that these facts make possible; he models conjectures and opportunities in the form of scenarios that could unfold from these facts, triggered by specific interventions that it might become in his power to perform and through which the course of history might be changed to his advantage.

The area surrounding the Trondheim fjord had the strongest and most unified political structure in Norway and had served as its center of political power and legitimacy ever since its unification under Haraldr *inn hárfagri*. This regional political unity provided the only credible base for an effective opposition to King Magnús. Of all of the affordances in the situation he faced, Eysteinn's failure may have struck him as the least improbable outcome that could open doors for him. All he had to do was to position himself so that if and when Eysteinn failed, Sverrir would be ready to step into his role.

At the heart of the narrative structure that allows Sverrir to navigate in a complex world is his understanding of himself. As discussed above, at an elementary level, this self-understanding is grounded in his proprioceptive awareness: his awareness of his own body. In the saga, this level of awareness is largely elided; Sverrir's physical presence is almost completely edited out. We are not given a sense of how he experienced himself or his physical prowess, and the history of his marriage, marital life, and becoming a father four times before arriving in Norway are absent from the story. These aspects of his being are implicitly treated as the characteristics of a private man, a distraction from his social identity as a king. In the many instances where his physical endurance is stretched to the limit, the saga emphasizes the objective hardship, without giving us access to a first-person perspective. Yet this proprioceptive self lies at the base of his actions and determines to a significant degree what he decides to undertake. Repeatedly, the saga describes how he "fekk mikit vás ok erfiði" (endured much fatigue and toil) (*Sverris saga* 2007, 11) on his travels. As he travels north through Sweden, they had to endure both hunger and freezing conditions; they did not have any food apart from tree-bark and berries hidden under the snow (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 8). These descriptions emphasize the cost Sverrir and his men had paid, hinting at an underlying cost / benefit analysis and perhaps an implicit justification of the privileges Sverrir and his men eventually achieved. They make no claim that Sverrir is unusually strong,

dexterous, enduring, or tolerant of suffering; the physical self is not highlighted as having any special qualifications. By eliding the physical self, the Sverrir behind the story may be betraying a lack of confidence in his material and physical royal ancestry, emphasizing instead an exceptionally foresightful intellect as his qualification for the kingship.

Sverrir's royal self is given rich expressions through his dreams long before it becomes a social reality. This imaginary self is a blend of his present self and the social role of a king, like a child's pretend self in play. In the saga, however, Sverrir experiences this particular self as an actual possibility. Several dreams are described in great detail and presented as evidence that Sverrir is destined for greatness. The narrative is also explicit in pointing out that Sverrir himself interpreted the dreams as both a foreshadowing of his glorious future and a transcendental endorsement of his aspirations (Schach 1971; Busygin 2003). As soon as he has accepted the leadership of the Birkibeinar, he dreams Samuel tells him he is sent by God: he "smurði hendr hans" (sanctified his hands), as if to anoint him as God's chosen "at stjórna mǫrgum lýðum" (to govern many people) (*Sverris saga* 2007, 17). The self in the dream is not simply identified with Sverrir's waking self – he has not literally been told by God that he will be king (for a discussion, see Lönnroth 2006). Rather, he seeks to demonstrate that it is his royal self that motivates and organizes his actions and leads to his achievements; the gap between what he is and what he could be generates a narrative tension filled with desire. Sverrir clearly does not believe that these dreams simply present what is going to happen (for the epistemic status of dreams at the time, see Turville-Petre 1958). There is no one-to-one correspondence between the content of the dreams and the facts on the ground; rather, Sverrir's dreams show us that he is motivated by the idea that he is destined for greatness, that he sees an advantage to claiming he is chosen by God, and that he wishes to convey his determination to prevail against the odds. The playful self has morphed into an aspirational self that generates powerful emotions in response to vividly imagined scenarios; these reach far beyond the facts and even far beyond the possible. It occupies spaces that guide his aspirations and spur his desires, serving to make becoming king appear at once more salient and more likely. At the same time, the ideal self makes no contribution to developing successful strategies for how to achieve that goal.

His pragmatic waking imagination, in contrast, represents the self in terms of its actual resources, situated in its actual state space; it is ruthlessly realistic in exploring and assessing what he has to do to move his project forward. This is where we see Sverrir's core strength: he uses his mind to model the world in precise detail and cheaply simulate multiple strategies and their

likely outcomes. He realizes early on that his men lack his vision and cannot be relied on to provide the way forward:

> ok hann varð at bera vanda fyrir þeim er honum þjónuðu, með því at engi var sá annarr er ráð kunni gera nema hann sjálfr í þessu liði er hann hafði við tekit ok sitt ráð við bundit. (*Sverris saga* 2007, 18)

> [and he had to take care of them who served him, since there was no one else who could be in charge, except for him, amongst these men, who he had accepted and to whom he had committed.] (My translation)

Most of the men who join him, he realizes, are just interested in plunder, and will not be good companions for his desire to win the crown: "Eigi hafði hann lengi þeim flokki stýrt áðr en hann sá þat er fyrr hafði hann grunat, at eigi myndi hann mjǫk mega styðjask við þeira ráðagerð" (He had not been in charge of this troop for a long time, before he started to suspect that he would not be able to lean on their advice) (*Sverris saga* 2007, 19). He attentively gathers information about his men to discern their true intentions, constructing a rich world model in which his simulations can operate. By accurately representing the qualities of his men and connecting these with the challenges that lie ahead, Sverrir is able to select a small number of men he actually leads on his first expedition north. Imagining the difficulties he would encounter in Norway, now that his claim to the throne is known, he decides instead to go north through the deep and largely uninhabited forests of Sweden. This strategy is successful, though he nearly starves his men to death, and he arrives in Trøndelag undetected and unopposed.

As a chieftain, his task is to make good decisions and demonstrate his fitness by winning battles; Sverrir's actual skills are what carries him forward. After a confusing campaign in central Norway, where his opponents consistently outnumber him and he repeatedly outwits them, he succeeds in gaining control of Nidaros and is hailed as king at the Øyrating (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 12) in June of 1177. It is a year since he landed.

Conclusion

The study of the self reveals a layer of foundational cognitive flexibility that makes it possible for the son of a comb maker to become king. The self functions as a door to creativity because it allows a human agent system to "host" an infinity of identities in a playful simulation space. Each identity has a narrative structure that includes a conception of the resources available for

action, a range of possible goals, and a set of flexible strategies for overcoming obstacles and reaching an implausible goal. While non-human animals rely on the proprioceptive or literal self, human beings have developed the ability of simulating scenarios from the point of view of a pretend self that blends features from the literal self and another perceived or imaginary self. The core function of this pretend self is to open up the possibility space of play, to enable the child to become aware of novel and potential beneficial actions; it is a search function, designed to help us step out of the familiar and contemplate new perspectives.

In a social context, however, this capacity for pretense morphs into a capacity for social roles that are assigned material power. What was pretend play migrates into the executive mode, and the roles themselves become fiercely gated. *Sverris saga* is the story of the thoughts and actions that allowed an unknown young man from the Faroe Islands to gain access to the throne. It is fascinating as a story precisely because it explores the far reaches of the possible, with a confident grip on reality. Its peak moments are the discovery and execution of strategies that require very limited resources and achieve exceptional outcomes.

At the outset, Sverrir was faced with an exceedingly low probability of success; he is a social nobody without friends or resources. However, as portrayed in the saga, he has an unusual capacity for perceiving possibilities, however remote their chances of success may appear. Presenting himself as a champion of his purported father's family, he opens up a possibility space for them in which he becomes useful for their own interests. Acquiring a small rag-tag army, he soon realizes his best chances lie in being crowned by the pragmatic Trønder. In battle, he locates strategies that take his opponents by surprise and repeatedly wins. He is self-consciously aware of his unusual ability to navigate in complex and multidimensional state space, learning to trust his own judgment.

Sverrir very successfully exploits the upside *kostir* or opportunities of the precarious self, but during his 25-year reign he is also unable to escape its downside consequences. In spite of his hypertrophied ability to look ahead and make good decisions that allow him to realize the remote and implausible goal of becoming king, Sverrir is never able to quell the sizable opposition to his rule. During his long reign he faces continued and recurring opposition. The strongest argument he makes for people to support him is simply his pragmatic skills; these ensure that Sverrir benefits those who follow him. Arrayed against him was the king of Denmark and the Church, championing a traditionalist view of social roles as grounded in nature.

Sverris saga itself can be understood as the king's concerted attempt to justify his kingship, telling the story of his life with a clear focus on bringing out

his exceptional capacity to understand the world as a vast unfolding space of possibilities, in which low-probability possibilities can be systematically targeted in order to achieve extraordinary outcomes. This, he implies, is what you want in a king. "Ok em ek sá" (I am that man), he proclaims, who combines multiple social identities and roles into one:

> "Aldaskipti er mikit orðit, sem þér meguð sjá, ok er undarliga orðit er einn maðr er nú fyrir þrja: einn fyrir konung ok einn fyrir jarl, einn fyrir erkibyskup, ok em ek sá."
> (*Sverris saga* 2007, 61)

> ["The times have changed greatly, as you can see, and it is extraordinary that one man now takes the place of three: a king and an earl and an archbishop, and I am that man."]
> (My translation)

It really makes you wish he actually was an impostor, a nobody who realized that anybody could be king.

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Multiple Spaces, Multiple Selves? The Case of King Sverrir of Norway

Abstract: This article discusses the ways King Sverrir Sigurðarson of Norway (*r*. 1177–1202) perceived and represented himself. It seeks to move beyond the debate on whether he was mainly a leader of warriors who sought recognition for martial honor and success at the battlefield, or whether he consciously used Biblical and hagiographic references to imitate King David and St. Óláfr, the patron saint of Norway. Instead, by taking departure from the concepts of social spaces (Bourdieu) and cultural hybridity (Bakhtin and Young), it is argued that King Sverrir moved between various discourses of the self. This is mostly based on the main sources to Sverrir's life, *Sverris saga*, but also the seal of Sverrir is analysed. The seal is seen as a multivocal expression of the royal self, speaking to several audiences.

Keywords: social spaces, seals, political culture, cultural hybridity, Sverrir Sigurðarson

The life of Sverrir, self-proclaimed son of King Sigurðr *munnr* Haraldsson (*r*. 1136–1155) and king of Norway from 1177 until his death in 1202, was truly worthy of a saga. *Sverris saga* is wholly devoted to the life and turbulent career of Sverrir, emphasizing his many battles and conflicts with numerous, and seemingly superior, opponents. The saga states that he grew up in the Faroe Isles as the son of a combmaker and his Norwegian wife. Being raised and educated by his uncle Hrói, bishop of the Faroes, he had possibly been ordained a priest by his early twenties. His mother, however, had concealed who his real father was, and during a pilgrimage to Rome she met the Pope and confessed to him that King Sigurðr *munnr* was Sverrir's real father. By papal command, she revealed to her son his royal ancestry. Sverrir then traveled to Norway and became a leader of a small band of warriors, the Birkibeinar ("Birchlegs"). They had opposed King Magnús Erlingsson under the leadership of Sverrir's cousin, but after some initial success in 1176, they had lost both their leader and most of their men at the Battle of Re in 1177.

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Seven years after this seemingly crushing defeat, the Birkibeinar, under Sverrir's leadership, had defeated and killed both King Magnús and his powerful father Erlingr *skakki*. As king, Sverrir managed to defend himself against the excommunications of the archbishops of Nidaros, a papal interdict, and several new pretenders backed by a network of magnates who had lost family members, property, and positions after Sverrir's takeover. In 1202, King Sverrir died peacefully in his bed after having laid the foundations of a royal dynasty that survived well into the fourteenth century.

His turbulent life made him both sworn enemies as well as loyal followers. While his opponents would often call him a coward, impostor, and even an apostate and a servant of the Devil, on his memorial plaque he was remembered as "a model and ornament of faith and manhood" (*dœmi trúar, prýði ok drengskapar*).[1] In modern historiography, his legacy has been no less contested than during his lifetime. Some historians have hailed him as one who defied foreign, papal authority in protecting national interests. Others have dismissed him as an impostor who conned his way to the throne and disrupted the development of Norwegian kingship, while more recent historians have regarded him as one of many pretenders, but who was simply more skilled in military strategy, political rhetoric, and building alliances than his rivals (Krag 2005, 236–54).

This article does not aim to settle whether Sverrir was the son of a king or a combmaker, but rather analyze how he performed and communicated his royal self and shaped others' perceptions of himself during his contested rule. Several scholars have discussed the performative self, maybe most famously by Stephen Greenblatt who saw the Renaissance as the period when people began to fashion individual identities self-consciously. This they did by developing a "consistent mode of perceiving and behaving" (Greenblatt 2005, 2) in the creation of oneself according to a set of socially acceptable standards. The self-fashioning in the English Renaissance was, however, not only yet another example of how culture fixed a role or script for the individual, but rather enabled the individual to conceive themselves as being able to enter into and out of malleable roles in life no less than literature. Greenblatt thus contrasts the Renaissance to medieval culture, when, on the one hand, the court disciplined the nobility into strict roles, and, on the other hand, the institution of confession and penitential practices formed a technology of the self: the sinner's inward look, the creation of a strict language of inner life, and the institutional framework that

1 *Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 182. All translations into English from this edition of *Sverris saga* are my own.

created links between narratives and experiences of a self that was constantly under scrutiny (Greenblatt 2005, xiii–xiv).

Several studies have modified such images of medieval conceptions and performances of the self, for instance, Susan Crane, who has argued that people in the fourteenth century used communicative behavior through visual, rhetorical, and material resources to display socially engaged selves during ceremonies, rituals, festivals, and spectacles (Crane 2002). Still, the medieval self has most often been discussed in relation to a religious discourse in which the development of the self was related to God, or to the path to salvation. For scholars like Brian Stock and Suzanne Verderber, the learned humanists and authors of romances may have explored a self-awareness beyond religious circles, but then either as a result of the withdrawal from the world towards inward reflectiveness (Stock 1995, 725), or by the transfer of the institutionalization of private confession and its reflexivity of inner life, separating the inside and outside of individual into other fields, including the courtly context (Verderber 2013, 11).

When Sverrir arrived in Norway in the late 1170s, Norwegian society was a multifaceted one. Thus, he had to relate to several social fields or spaces, both secular and religious institutions and spaces. In this study, "social space" is related to Bourdieu's understanding of the concept. A social space exists when a certain group of people and institutions compete for a common set of active properties: that is, properties or capital that are able to confer power on their possessor within this space (Bourdieu 1991, 229–30). Individuals are positioned somewhere in a certain social space, which is defined by the accumulation of different types of the active capital, economic or cultural, s/he possesses. Cultural capital implies that every action or choice in a whole range of diverse domains of practices makes a difference, or distinction, between the agents in the given social field. It is the clustering of certain practices, preferences, and symbolic expressions made into lifestyles that constitute "classes" or groups in the social space. These groups have more in common in relation to cultural or symbolic aspects, than simply being defined by economic resources (Bourdieu 1991, 229–51).

Bourdieu further argued that social space tends to be manifested in physical space. The social positions structure the environment and landscape according to the distinctions people bear in their mind:

> each agent may be characterized by the place where he or she is situated more or less permanently, that is, by her place of residence [. . .] and by the relative position that her localizations, temporary . . . and permanent, occupy in relation to the localizations of other agents [. . .] It follows that the locus and the place occupied by an agent in appropriated social space are excellent indicators of his or her position in social space.
>
> (Bourdieu 1996, 10)

These spaces, or social contexts, of the agents, are thus linked to the mental organization of the landscape.

At first glance, twelfth-century Norway would have more in common with the Kabyle society in Algeria as Bourdieu analyzed it in the late 1950s, than the French society he studied in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Bourdieu, the Kabyles lived within a unified social space, where a notion of honor was the prime signifier of habitus and the physical space was largely structured around the households. He termed this kind of society "doxic," which means that the "established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, i.e., as one possible order among others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned" (Bourdieu 1977, 166). Modern nations, on the other hand, would be more complex, consisting of several "sub-fields," such as fields related to the academic world, to art, sport, business, and industrial workplaces. Thus, even though Bourdieu was more concerned with social reproduction than change, we can hypothesize that there can be a development from a doxic position of the individual to a more pluralistic, multidimensional, and "heterodoxic" one in transformative periods. This may be applied to twelfth-century Norway, when new social institutions, relations, and practices developed, and agents had to relate to more than one field. Thus, the competition for power and the self-fashioning to acquire a high position as an outsider may have been more complex and contradictory than often assumed.

We might distinguish between at least five different social spaces in twelfth-century Norway. First, medieval Norway was dominated by an agricultural economy, making the farming household a key social unit for individuals. In such a household society, especially in regions and contexts where governmental institutions had less impact, honor was a crucial capital and identity marker. While honor-based behavior can be understood as outward-focused, keeping up a face rather than searching one's soul and seeking self-knowledge, scholars have pointed out how Old Norse literature, especially the Sagas of Icelanders, not only show the individual's involvement in self-assessing in accordance to a cultural code, but also negotiates anxieties concerning social performance and inner lives. Furthermore, emotions and self-enacting in the Old Norse sagas evolve around the strategies of revenge at the right moment, with the capacity for a consciousness to see yourself as others see and evaluate you: "To the extent that 'deep' inner lives require self-knowledge, self-mockery, self-doubt, and self-assessment these people had the capacity of deep inner lives." (Miller 1995, 206–7)

Second, the court developed (although far from in a straight line) into a more exclusive space of retainers and clerks surrounding the king. Here, performance through luxurious clothing and consumption was important. At the same time, these men were supposed to perform as brave warriors. However, the

battlefield as a social field that distinguished good from bad warriors also became complex and more multifaceted than before. The purpose, practices, and intention of warfare had become crucial, in addition to bravery, in distinguishing noble warriors from enemies of kingship and Christianity (Bandlien 2019).

Third, with the establishment of the archbishopric at Nidaros in 1152/53, new theological ideas gained hold in Norway. Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson (1157–1188) had attended the school of the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris in the 1140s and strongly promoted the Augustinian order after his return to Norway. Eysteinn must have been intimately familiar with the ideas of Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141), who, in his instructions to novices, urged his followers to be constantly self-probing to one's thoughts, speech, and actions and learn from experience. His program for students was marked by a tension between the outer and the inner man, but also by how these ultimately were to harmonize inner and outer behavior (van 't Spijker 2004, 59–128).

While Hugh's teachings would appeal to intellectuals of the newly established cathedral schools in Norway, the more ascetic-minded Benedictines tended to emphasize physical seclusion from the outer world, in the hermit cell or at the margins of society, as a path to sculpt the *homo interior* from a fleshly and hostile material. This is expressed, for example, by Peter Damian (d. 1072): " . . . beaten now by the hammer of discipline, and polished by the file of penitence and holy combat, you may afterwards be put in the order of the fiery stones, without tingling or rustle." (van 't Spijker 2004, 55).

The Cistercians, the third monastic order introduced in twelfth-century Norway, also had its distinct, and arguably a more complex, legacy of the self as developed by Bernard of Clairvaux. As Caroline Bynum has argued, Bernard did not see the self as either body or soul, or even as both becoming one, but rather a wondrous *mixtura*; a hybrid in constant dialogue. This hybrid was constantly in danger of fragmentation, but was still a necessary doubleness for the self to be part of divinity and in one with God (Bynum 2001, 113–62; see also Engh, this volume).

It is thus necessary to analyze the differences and negotiations within the sources related to Sverrir, first how he positioned himself within various social spaces, and second how the self of Sverrir changed according to spatial shifts. Such a reading will help us evaluate in what way a text such as *Sverris saga* enters into field-related relations, intertextually, politically, and culturally. A high degree of intertextuality can be a sign of contesting discourses of the self, and negotiations of which discourse has hegemony over others (Fairclough 1992, 102–17; Gramsci 1971).

This also suggests that the same text or narrative could be received differently by various audiences, interpreting it within their social fields. At the same time,

individuals would be part of, or at least relate, to various fields. Such Bakhtinian readings of sagas may draw on the concept of "linguistic hybridity," the fusion of different linguistic systems or genres into different forms of "cultural hybridity" (Young 1995). Most relevant in the context of twelfth-century Norway is "intentional," or "conscious," hybridity, that stresses the way in which utterances can be double-voiced:

> What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical and compositional markers to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages," two semantic and axiological belief systems . . . It frequently happens that even one and the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction – and consequently, the word has two contradictory meanings, two accents.
> (Bakhtin 1980, 304–5)

Polyphony, or dialogical plurality of voices achieved through narrative reticence, direct speech, shifting styles, and prosimetrum, has been pointed out as characterizing many of the sagas, especially considering the interplay between secular and hagiographic discourses (Phelpstead 2007; see also Grønlie 2012). This implies not only a discussion of the individual or the self in relation to change and distinguished from others (Gurevich 1992), but also allows for a more complex understanding of the self, related to various discursive systems and social spaces.

Sverris saga – For Whom, For What?

Sverris saga is among the earliest Old Norse sagas to have been preserved. The author, Karl Jónsson, was abbot at the Benedictine monastery at Þingeyrar in northern Iceland, and probably began his work during a visit to Norway between 1185 and 1188, shortly after Sverrir had killed his rival King Magnús Erlingsson. According to the introduction of the saga, Sverrir himself dictated the first part of the saga, named *Grýla*. How far *Grýla* extended is disputed (some scholars suggest it ended at chapter 31, others as late as chapter 109), but the saga was probably finished, editing *Grýla* into it, some years after Sverrir's death in 1202, possibly by Karl Jónsson (d. 1212/13) himself (Bagge 1996, 15–8; Þorleifur Hauksson 2006). This suggests that the first part of the saga was written during the intense and bitter struggle between King Sverrir and Archbishop Eysteinn in the wake Sverrir's victory over King Magnús, while the latter part was written after a settlement had been made between the

Birkibeinar, supporting the candidacy of the grandson of Sverrir, and their opponents, the Baglar ("Croziers").

The hagiographic and learned elements of *Sverris saga* have been pointed out by several scholars (Ármann Jakobsson 2015, with references). This has often been linked to its place among the very active and pioneering literary milieu at Þingeyrar monastery (Haki Antonsson 2012; Bandlien 2016). In a recent discussion of *Sverris saga* ideology and description of society, however, Sverre Bagge argues that even though a monk initially wrote the saga, the audience was most probably warriors. Bagge concludes that "the portrait of Sverrir as a great general and leader of men offers a better understanding of Sverrir's individuality and identity as presented in the saga, than do the idea of God's vocation and the references to David and sacred history" (Bagge 1996, 65). On the other hand, it could also be argued that it is impossible to understand Sverrir's identity *without* the many references to sacred history and the support of God. Even though, as Bagge argues, *Sverris saga* "does not set forth the general ideology of sacral kingship" (Bagge 1996, 81), the emphasis on the divine vocation and God's intervention in Sverrir's favor is hardly a superficial element of the saga. Karl Jónsson seems to have stressed most of all Sverrir's legitimation of suitability for audiences belonging to various social spaces. Thus, the intended audience included not only the Birkibeinar themselves, but also other supporters and opponents among the secular and clerical élite, trying to convince them of Sverrir's superior qualities as a ruler and his support from God.

Sverrir as Transmitter of Divine Terror

The first part of *Sverris saga* is called *Grýla*, a term that elsewhere in Norse literature and tradition refers to a troll-woman. The name is probably deduced from "terror," proposing the wider meaning of "terror-maker." It seems strange that this should be connected to Sverrir, but the saga in fact opens with an account of the terror evoked by Sverrir. While pregnant, his mother dreamed that she was in labor and that her servant woman became terrified of the fetus' nature. It seemed like a big stone with the white, sparkling quality of a glowing piece of iron. Although she tried to wrap it in clothing, terror stood out from it (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 1).

Shortly after, Sverrir dreamed that St. Óláfr, the royal patron saint of Norway, ancestor of the Norwegian kings, and depicted in the twelfth century as an ideal ruler, himself fought against Magnús Erlingsson and Erlingr *skakki* (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 5). St. Óláfr called upon Sverrir and asked him to fight with him. Then

Sverrir was able to put fear into his enemies' minds so that they withdrew. Such terror-striking appearance is also found in another of Sverrir's dreams, where the prophet Samuel himself seemed to anoint Sverrir – in the manner of a new David (Lönnroth 2006). The vision of Samuel made Sverrir tremble, but Samuel himself explained that he came to bring peace (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 10). This combination of bringing both fear and peace is something Sverrir himself said was his purpose as a ruler.

Such notion of kings bringing terror may go back to the conception of "terror-helmets," mentioned in early panegyric skaldic poems when kings put fear into their opponents' breasts. However, this kind of striking of fear is also mentioned in connection to holy kings with God on their side: for instance, St. Knud of Denmark who was, according to the monk Ælnoth writing in the early twelfth century, shaped into a glorious warrior by God and made other people respect and fear him (Ælnoth 1986, chs. 6, 10). We find the same idea in the late-twelfh-century narratives of St. Óláfr. In the so-called *Legendary Saga of St. Olaf* (ON = *Helgi saga Óláfs konungs Haraldssonar*, or *Óláfs saga hins helga*), probably contemporary to the final version of *Sverris saga*, it is stated that, after his death at the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030, the king's body had such an intensively bright and frightening appearance that one of his murderers became blind (*Óláfs saga hins helga* 1982, ch. 86). Earlier in the *Legendary Saga*, an angel appeared with supernatural and terror-striking brightness when he warned a heathen chieftain against fighting St. Óláfr (*Óláfs saga hins helga* 1982, ch. 32). These episodes point to the fear that holiness brought on disbelievers or heathens.

Sverrir as a "terror-striking" warrior and ruler arguably provides the best explanation for naming the first part of the saga *Grýla*. It directs the readers' attention to the support he had from Christ and St. Óláfr when facing his unjust and ignorant opponents who refused to acknowledge divine support for his career. In this sense, Sverrir is predestined to be the messenger sent by God to spread terror among the foes of St. Óláfr. The stone depicted as his mother's dream is noteworthy, as it shows that Sverrir was something other than the malleable material that could be shaped by bodily asceticism and distance from the world, as in the quote of Peter Damian cited above. He is, in reference to the Bible, shaped and chosen by God even before his birth.

Imitating St. Óláfr and the Suitability of the King

In the dream where Sverrir saw St. Óláfr fight against Magnús Erlingsson and Erlingr *skakki*, he saw himself as the saint's standard-bearer (*Sverris saga* 2007,

ch. 5). This is also the first time in the saga that Sverrir is called "Magnús," a name that not only alluded to Charlemagne ("Karlamagnús" in Old Norse), but also indicated that St. Óláfr had taken Sverrir as his new son, recalling that the biological son of Óláfr was the first king named Magnús in Norway.

From then on, there are several analogues between Sverrir's career and the saint's life as described in the *Legendary Saga*. Shortly after his dream, Sverrir managed to win the standard from the ignorant peasants of Nidaros. Sverrir follows in the footsteps of St. Óláfr on several occasions. First, when he travels to Selja (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 6), the holy place where Óláfr also first stepped on Norwegian soil as a king (*Óláfs saga hins helga* 1982, ch. 19). Later on, he, in a Gideon-like manner, trims the number of his warriors from 300 to 80, dismissing those who were merely interested in raiding (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 11), thus imitating how St. Óláfr had excluded all those who did not want to be baptized before the battle of Stiklestad (*Óláfs saga hins helga* 1982, chs. 72–3). Before a battle against a great peasant army, he also used the same battle cry that St. Óláfr had allegedly used at Stiklestad: "Forward, forward christmen, crossmen, and the holy king Óláfr's men!" (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 163).

In this way, Sverrir is shown as God's and St. Óláfr's true warrior, an identity that in *Sverris saga* is not only connected with being victorious in battle, but also something that must be shown in his conduct. These new mores can be seen in his willingness to give peace to his enemies, his avoidance of women, and his resistance to drunkenness. The saga stresses repeatedly that Sverrir gave peace (*grið*) to those of his enemies who would receive it, and forgiveness and a Christian funeral to those who had died. It has previously been noted that to give mercy is a natural political weapon in twelfth-century politics; those who were forgiven would owe the king their lives and thus be loyal to him. This seems like a plausible explanation for several episodes where he bestowed *grið*. In *Sverris saga*, such bestowal of *grið* is also religiously motivated. After his first battle in 1177, he thanked God, the Virgin Mary, and St. Óláfr for being victorious, and "showed his gratefulness when he gave *grið* to all those who asked for it" (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 15). The sparing of the lives of his enemies is here an expression of gratitude to the Lord, a return of favor for his help from God. Still, it was only those who explicitly asked for mercy that received it. According to *Sverris saga*, those who did not ask for forgiveness were fighting against God's will and St. Óláfr's peace (chs. 136, 146, 169). The politics and strategy of Sverrir may very well be interpreted as one based on physical power, but was justified in a wider, religious sense in the saga.

In this respect, the last battle in *Sverris saga* is most interesting. Sverrir managed, after a siege for almost five months, to force the Baglar to surrender at Tønsberg in 1202. Among the Birkebeinar, there was a strong consensus for

killing the surviving Baglar because they wanted to avenge their family members killed by the enemy and the many shameful allegations raised against them. Sverrir, however, argued strongly for giving them *grið*, even if he himself had lost his half-brother during the fighting and had been on the received end of many shameful libels from the Baglar:

> . . . enn nú i vetr munu þér heyrt hafa at þeir hafa Sverri kallat bikkju eðr meri ok mǫrgum ǫðrum illum nǫfnum. Nú vil ek þat fyrigefa þeim fyrir Guðs sakir ok vænta þar á mót af honum fyrirgefningar þess er ek hefir honum á móti gǫrt. Eigu þér ekki síðr sálur en ek ok eigið þess at minnask. Engi máður mun kalla yðr helldr bleyðimenn firir þessa sǫk. (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 179)

> [This winter you may have heard that they [the Baglar] have called Sverrir "bitch" or "mare" and many other bad names. Now I want to forgive them for the sake of God, and in return I hope for forgiveness from Him for all I have done against Him. You [the Birkibeinar] have not any less soul than I have, and you should remember that. And no man will call you soft men because of this.] (My translation)

"Bitch" and "mare" clearly had a biting sting in twelfth-century politics, and elsewhere in the sagas such words alone would legitimate vengeance. Indeed, it was imperative by law to take revenge against the one who uttered such words – if not, the object of such libels should be considered a man without honor. The consequence for not taking revenge would be that he not only lost the respect of the community, but also was not allowed to be a witness and swear oaths at assemblies. Sverrir thus appealed to a different discourse than his warriors were used to, where mercy for the case of God and the care of their souls gained hegemony over the practice of vengeance.

This habit of giving *grið* to whoever asked for it also works as a contrast to how his opponents wanted to see the dead bodies of the Birkibeinar being eaten by dogs, wolves, and ravens. This recalls the earlier skaldic poetry that praises the ruler for feeding these animals. In *Sverris saga*, this conventional discourse of the battlefield is transformed into a new, Christian significance, as an attribute of the unjust ruler who do not possess Sverrir's mercy and care for Christian souls.

This does not mean that Sverrir refrained from the discourse of revenge. During an attempt at settlement with King Magnús, Sverrir listed the relatives he had lost due to the rule of Magnús and Erlingr *skakki*; these included his father as well as several uncles, half-brothers, and cousins (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 60). The imperative of vengeance was very much a part of the underlying legitimation of Sverrir's fight, although the kings disagreed on who had lost the most kindred.

However, Sverrir remains a better imitator of St. Óláfr than King Magnús Erlingsson. This was a crucial element in the conception of kingship from the coronation of Magnús Erlingsson in 1163. In connection with this coronation, a new law on royal succession was sanctioned at an assembly in Nidaros. Here, the principle of primogeniture was introduced for the first time in Norway. Still, this new law of succession had some reservations – if injustice and evilness were to take control of the eldest son, the brother whom the archbishop and the bishops and the twelve best men from each diocese thought best suited should be king. When there is no legitimate son, then the closest male relative should be elected, but only if he is suited to be king – if no suitable relative can be found, the law continues, the one who, according to the elected, is best suited to guard both God's laws and the law of the land shall be king. When the bishops and the elected disagreed, the candidate supported by the archbishop and bishops was to be elected (*Gulaþingslög* 1994, §2). In this way, the royal self had to be centered on notions of suitability. Among the élite, these notions would have connotations with the narratives of St. Óláfr, especially as they were presented in the *Legendary Saga*.

Asceticism and the Use of Marginal Space

On several occasions, the saga presents Norway as a space similar to the Holy Land itself, and his fights as similar to crusades. First, Sverrir loaded his battles with religious symbols. As mentioned above, he used the battle cry of St. Óláfr. He also showed a high esteem for the Virgin Mary (*Sverris saga* 2007, chs. 15, 18, 20). His great warship, Maríusúðin, was dedicated to her, and Sverrir prayed for strength and luck to all those who sailed with it (ch. 80). Relics were built into the ship, and this later helped him in the battle of Fimreite in 1184 (ch. 91). The Kuflungar, a group of opponents active in the late 1180s, later burnt it, a sacrilege mentioned along with the breaking of Church peace and other miracles; it was said that the holy cross in the church was sweating as a consequence (ch. 102). This ship may be compared to the legendary sword Durendal, used by Roland in the service of Charlemagne. This sword contained a tooth of St. Peter, some blood of St. Basil, hairs of St. Denis, and a piece of Mary's clothing, and Roland did his outmost to stop the heathens from attainting it. Like that famous sword, Maríusúðin was a floating reliquary designed for battle against the enemies of St. Óláfr and his "son".

However, Sverrir never went to the Holy Land, although he once had the intention to do so (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 9). Instead, he made the Holy Land come

to him. He named a castle outside Nidaros Síon (Zion), a manifestation of the analogue between Sverrir and David. This emphasized that Sverrir indeed was chosen by God to rule Norway. Nearby was the hill called Feginsbrekka ("Hill of Grace"), analogous to the famous Montjoie in the Holy Land, where Sverrir is said to have knelt in prayers (ch. 35). The name was hardly an invention by Sverrir but rather a reflection of the status of St. Óláfr's church as a main pilgrimage center. By relating the castle Síon to the relics and church of St. Óláfr, Sverrir emphasized his special connection to this center of Christendom.

On the other hand, Sverrir is presented in the early part of the saga like an ascetic in the wilderness. After arriving in Norway, he repeatedly had to walk in deep, unknown woods, suffering from cold and hunger (*Severris saga* 2007, chs. 7, 12, 18–20). This emphasis on the ascetic virtues of Sverrir and his men in the margins is unique in a king's saga, and the closest analogue is with traditional hagiography. A traditional vogue in medieval monasticism, from the time when Antony walked into the Egyptian desert *c.* 270, was to avoid the temptations of courts and urban centers. In this context, the wilderness was understood as an arena for testing spiritual steadfastness and faith in God when facing the evil forces outside civilization. The vagrant life on the edge of death became vitalized through the monastic ideals of renouncing all forms of luxury and splendor and avoiding contact with cities. In later monastic tradition, especially in the Benedictine and Cistercian orders, monks were above all supposed to fight well against their own vices and the enticements of malign spirits in the place of vast wilderness. From this renouncement of the privileges of civilization, they could claim authority in certain contexts, for instance, in calling people to penance.

In *Sverris saga*, the authority based on asceticism and the wilderness is more important in the formation of a royal self than in any other Norwegian text. This is especially evident in an episode when the Birkibeinar encounter the snaring of the Devil. On a hazardous crossing of the mountain area in southern Norway, a terrible snowstorm fell upon Sverrir and his men. They lost 120 horses with golden saddles, along with clothes and weapons. For eight days, they had nothing to eat or drink but snow. The situation was so desperate that a number of them considered suicide. Some men wanted to jump off cliffs to end their suffering, while others thought it more proper to use their weapons against themselves. Sverrir, however, understood that these thoughts were merely the trappings of the Devil. He told his men that suicide was only the deed of men who had gone mad, or committed by someone who did not control himself. His men should instead repent their sins and beg for mercy with piety and humbleness. Then the weather cleared up so that they were able to see their path (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 20). In hagiography, this kind of spiritual

persistence during bodily trials is a clear sign of virtue (Wellendorf 2014 has a different interpretation of this episode).

It is no wonder, then, that Sverrir hailed his men when, at a time they were forced to flee, they left all of their belongings in a way unheard of – thus showing how they were unattached to worldly glory (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 33). Later, he would recall the memory of his first retainers; they did not spend their time drinking and could endure hardship much better than his warriors did later on (chs. 40, 57, 43, 164). In the last chapter of the saga, it was recalled how the king himself continued to eat just one meal a day and never drank too much even after he became king (ch. 181).

How much of this was Sverrir's own rhetoric, and how much was the responsibility of the saga author? Karl Jónsson was himself a Benedictine monk at Þingeyrar, and thus familiar with the rhetoric of virtuous supremacy at the margins of society, as is evident in, for instance, other sagas written at the monastery. He may also have had an interest in depicting Sverrir as an ideal ruler showing power although avoiding worldly pride. However, there is also evidence that indicates that this was Sverrir's own rhetoric, and that he wanted recognition of his masculinity within the Church as much as from his warriors. First, he was most likely educated at the cathedral school in the Faroes during his youth. Thus, Sverrir had at least a basic knowledge of theology and political writings, something that enabled him to form a very strong and effective religious counter-rhetoric, even against his learned opponents. Trained as a cleric, he must have been well aware of the crime of killing an anointing king. He had probably built up a strong rhetorical legitimation of his aspiration to kingship by the early 1180s. In *A Speech against the Bishops*, a pamphlet written by a cleric loyal to Sverrir around 1200, the author attacked the clergy in Norway for their immorality. Instead of being proper limbs on the kingdom's body, they had become dysfunctional. The bishops, who were supposed to be the eyes of the kingdom and leading the people, had become blind (*En tale mot biskopene* 1931, 1–2). This body is the rhetoric of a learned and clerical élite, but cleverly redirected against the clergy and legitimating the claim that Sverrir should be head and chest, both king and archbishop, on the social body.

Sverrir also seems to have had close contact with the Cistercian abbey at Höfuðey outside Oslo. He is said to have heard Mass there (*Sverris saga* 2007, chs. 134, 136), and he trusted the abbey so much as to leave his treasure in the wall of its church. In 1200, the Cistercian General Chapter condemned monks for having Masses for the excommunicated King Sverrir and punished them harshly (three days in *gravi culpa*). Other monks who had exchanged kisses of peace or had conversation with the king should be whipped and should fast for three days.

No less important is that this ascetic discourse was used by Sverrir to elevate himself not only over the immoral clergy, but also over his opponents, King Magnús Erlingsson and his father Erlingr *skakki*. King Magnús is said to have dressed in a fashionable way, was fond of splendor, and was a notorious womanizer (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 98). This is even more relevant to drinking habits. It is said that Sverrir never drank so much that he lost control over himself (ch. 181). Sverrir's exceptional moderation in drinking is used as a sign of self-control and firmness, indicating that Sverrir was superior to his enemies. This is especially clear when the saga writer includes an episode where one of Erlingr's men reproached his leader: "some say, my lord, that you give more attention to getting drunk on ale and wine than to giving your men firm orders they can rely on" (En mæla þat sumir men, herra, at þér gefið meira gaum at gera yðr mjǫk drukkna af miði eða vini en gera staðfastlig ráð fyrir liði yðru) (ch. 34). Drunkenness made him unreliable and lacking in judgement: in short, unsuitable as a leader. The same is implied in the portrait of his son Magnús, whose men were often weakened in battle because of heavy drinking (chs. 31, 33, 64, 70, 76, 98; Ármann Jakobsson 2015, 120–1).

Again, there are intertextual references here to contemporary texts, most evidently to the new moral standards that St. Óláfr initiated according to the *Legendary Saga*. St. Óláfr drank milk instead of mead because he did not want to lose his senses, and he had his men follow his example (*Óláfs saga hins helga* 1982, ch. 24). More explicit condemnations of drinking are found in the contemporary *Norwegian Book of Homilies*, written in Bergen around 1200, where it is said that where drinking rules over man, there the Devil rules (*Gamal norsk Homiliebok* 1931, 33). This connects Sverrir with the existing ascetic virtues of his day, appropriating monastic rhetoric about authority derived from self-control as a disruption to the communal drinking at court. This means that Sverrir is not only morally superior to his rivals, but also transfers the idea of the congruence of bodily practices and inner self to his retainers, who were in turn supposed to be shaped by the authority of their leader. This brings the king's followers more in line with the teaching of a canonical community, than with a traditional royal *hirð* that shared their drinking while the table setting was highly ranked.

King Sverrir as a New Man in His Seal

In the late 1850s, a seal matrix was found during the construction of a cellar in central Tønsberg, a medieval town on the west side of Oslofjord (Nicolaysen 1862–1866, 769). In the center, a lion rampant is engraved, flanked by twigs

with leaves and flowers, and with a small, lying 'S' framed within a square below the right paw. The legend is a verse in pentameter and reads "+ VERVS TESTIS EGO NVNTIA VERA TEGO" (+ true witness I am, true messages I cover). In his edition of Norwegian seals, Christopher Brinchmann suggested that this was the seal of Earl Skúli Bárðarson (d. 1240), co-regent of Norway with King Hákon Hákonarson (*r.* 1217–1263). He had stayed in Tønsberg several winters around 1220 and used a seal with a lion rampant in 1225 (Brinchmann 1924, 2). Oluf Kolsrud (1921, 33–4) supported this suggestion, pointing out that the lion was uncrowned, and that the lion rampant had be inspired by the arms of Simon V Montfort, Earl of Leicester (d. 1218).

Odd Fjordholm, however, argued that this was the seal matrix of Sverrir Sigurðarson (*r.* 1177–1202). He pointed out that the English chronicler William of Newburgh (d. *c.* 1198) stated that Sverrir's seal had the legend "Sverus rex Magnus, ferus ut leo, mitis ut agnus" (King Sverre Magnus, fierce as a lamb) (Fjordholm 1882, III.6, 232). Fjordholm noted that *ferus* alludes to *verus*, and that both may refer to *Sverus*. He suggested that the seal matrix found in Tønsberg may have been the counterseal to the one that William of Newburgh quoted (Fjordholm 1973), and that it might have been lost during Sverrir's last campaign, his long siege of the Baglar at Tønsberg in 1201–1202.

The legend of the seal is remarkable not only because the suggested provenance makes it the earliest preserved royal seal in Norway, but also because we find no similar legend on any other seal in medieval Norway. Despite – or perhaps because – of a condensed space for expression, not least compared to the

Fig. 1: Drawing based on the impression of the seal matrix of King Sverrir (National Archives, Oslo). The original is in the Museum of Cultural History, Oslo (C3203).

saga, it has the potential of encapsulating Sverrir's agency within the space of a few square centimeters. The importance of medieval seals has been emphasized in several works by Bedos-Rezak. She has shown how they were used as metaphor for semiotic relationships between the subject and the material during the twelfth century (drawing on the prescholastic onthology of Christ's presence in the Eucharist). In extension of this, she has argued that seals signified its owner and "not only mediated but embodied the real presence of the individuals that affixed them" (Bedos-Rezak 2000, 1527).

In this context, it is noteworthy that the text on the seal matrix of Sverrir speaks as a subject, to some extent claiming authority for itself. It emphasizes the truthfulness of its commandments, making the letter it would have been fixed onto into a monument of authority with legal implications. If indeed lost during the siege of Tønsberg 1201–1202, this would have been used to defy any excommunicative efforts of the Pope; it is a "true witness" of how it, despite papal efforts to the contrary, covers *true* commandments, thus implying that other seals – or individuals – do not cover such truths. From an intertextual perspective, its authority can be related to the ascetic discourse and the suitability of the king, where Erlingr *skakki* and King Magnús Erlingsson failed to make true commands because of their drunkenness and the clerical élite failed due to their blindness.

The other seal legend, quoted by William of Newburgh, is even more striking. First, it names Sverrir as "Magnus," the name bestowed on him by St. Óláfr. Furthermore, being fierce as a lion and meek as a lamb resonates with learned literature in the twelfth century (Hermann Pálsson 1991). We find the same statement in *Sverris saga* in speeches made to the people after Sverrir's had defeated King Magnús Erlingsson. One of Sverrir's men, Svína-Pétr, talked to the men in Bergen, urging them to receive Sverrir with the ringing of bells and donations to the poor. Sverrir is promoted in the speech as a just king: wise, generous, eloquent, just, peaceful, and ready to protect the land (Charpentier Ljungqvist 2008). He is thus most suitable to rule, something that is used as proof of having been sent to the rule Norway by God. Furthermore, he professes a new kind of rule by him and his men; indeed, Sverrir himself has changed into a "new man":

> Nú er í brotu sá Sverrir er við hernaði fór til margra kaupstaða. Brautu ero nú ok þeir sǫmu Birkibeinar er hér sveimuðu um bœinn ok sópuðu óhreinliga hǫndum um hirzlor yðrar búanda. En hér munu nú koma með konungi várum mjúkir hirðmenn ok hógværir. er vera skal láss ok lykill firir frelsi oc friði þessa kaupstaðar ok annarra.
>
> (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 96)

> [He is gone now, the Sverrir who robbed many cities. Gone now are also those Birkibeinar that swarmed around in the town and grabbed with unclean hands in your treasures.

> Now, there will come mild and soft retainers with our king. They will be the lock and key for your freedom and peace in this and other towns.] (My translation)

It was God that has sent Sverrir to them; therefore, the townspeople should welcome him just as "God [. . .] and all God's holy men" (Guð [. . .] ok allir Guðs helgir menn) did (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 96).

Sverrir himself developed the ideal of the "mild" retainers shortly afterwards. This is shown especially during the king's speech, also given at Bergen, following reports that several of his own men had been involved in fighting because of heavy drinking, leading to several deaths (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 103). The retainers obviously had trouble being as just and peaceful as Svína-Pétr had promised. Then Sverrir held his famous speech against drunkenness, urging his men to be moderate in drinking (ch. 104). Drunkenness would first lead a man into poverty; next into oblivion; then to lust for what is wrong, especially theft and seducing women; further, to stir up violence without a cause; then to ruin a man's health and make his body weak; and as a final consequence, by yearning for filthy deeds and forgetting God, men would lose their soul. He then echoes the legend of his seal: "Warriors should be like lambs in peacetime and fierce as lions in war" (Hermenn skyldu vera í friði sem lamb, enn i ófriði ágiarnir sem león) (ch. 104).

Although similar warnings against drunkenness are found in several writings across Europe at the time, the most striking parallel to the rhetoric of the lamb and the lion is Bernard's praise of the Templars in the early twelfth century, where he discussed the mixed nature of a new knighthood. Indeed, the newness of Sverre and his men consists of the restoration of a fragmentation, or a dialogic doubleness of peace and war, of fierceness and meekness. It is this double nature that made possible the transformation of Sverrir from the "old king," who robbed cities, into the "new king," who was just and merciful. The speech furthermore alludes to the monastic and homiletic image of stages or steps, such as the Rule of Benedict's twelve steps of humility, Bernard's steps of humility and pride, or Hugh of St. Victor's heavenly ladder of the Mystic Ark. In his much simpler version of this scheme, Sverrir presents drunkenness as disturbing the mixture of the lion and the lamb, something that one senses would lead him, or rather his retainers and the people, to descend on the ladder, thus reversing the creation of a new ruler. To avoid this reversion, the king needs to remain the likeness of a lion – in an imperfect world such as Norwegian society during the late-twelfth century, this fierceness is indeed a necessity in order to become meek as a lamb.

Conclusion

The career of Sverrir shows how a pretender from the margins of society challenged the ideologies of kingship and sought to shape the perceptions of himself at the end of the twelfth century. The narrative of his life as found in *Sverris saga* indicates a complex intertextual relationship to several genres and discourses. This can be related to the many social spaces, and the audiences within them, that Sverrir had to position himself in following his arrival and career in Norway.

Sverris saga seems to be written with several audiences, within different spaces, in mind. The image of Sverrir as shaped as a terror-striking fetus in his mother's womb indicates that he is already unchangeable from birth, destined to become king. However, his trials in the wilderness place him within a monastic landscape that serves to form his self, distant from the court's dangerous temptations. The ascetic rhetoric, especially related to moderation in drink, integrates bodily discourse of self-control into the performance of royalty. Such a discourse includes the use of the image of the steps of virtue – implying a development of the soul into royal rhetoric of authority. This is also apparent when Sverrir presents himself as a "new man" after his victory against King Magnús in 1184; he is transformed from being a robber to a meek, yet at the same time, fierce and just ruler. In this way, the hegemonic discourse of the court itself, understood as the community of retainers, not only imitates St. Óláfr, a focal point for both kingship and the archiepiscopal church of Norway in the twelfth century, but also challenges, and partly changes, this discourse during his reign.

Partly shaped by Sverrir himself, the narrative of the man who grew up as the son of a combmaker and then became king of Norway carries a polyphonic discourse, wherein the same semiotics and practices carried different meanings for different audiences. For instance, forgiveness might be seen among his warriors as tactically wise to win the loyalty of defeated enemies, while for monks and clergy it was a sign of caring for not only his own soul, but also for the development of the souls of all people in the kingdom. Sverrir's seal develops this theme further, creating a set of doubles: lamb and lion, fierceness and meekness, warrior and monk – a similar dialogic hybridity as found in Bernard of Clairvaux's thinking.

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The Medieval Subject and the Saga Hero

Abstract: In this article an attempt is made to understand the way medieval Icelandic sagas stage their characters as an expression of a conflict of norms within the society which produced them, i.e. Iceland in the thirteenth century. Two contemporary sagas show how this conflict of norms is part of the reality facing chieftains in a society where they must use violence to preserve their power and protect themselves and their kinsmen, but where the fate of their souls is also at stake in a Christian world-view forcefully promoted by a militant Church. Two sagas of Icelanders are then studied in which this conflict of norms is thematized as one between Christianity and paganism. The conflict of norms in question is instrumental in generating an image of the self which is generated by the forces in presence in medieval culture.

Keywords: subject, subjectivation, honor, revenge, governmentality, confession, social norms, *libertas ecclesiae*, *privilegium fori*

A question has haunted the study of Nordic medieval culture and Old Norse-Icelandic literature from the beginning. It concerns the extent to which the sagas are about a tradition-bound society with roots in a pagan Viking culture and to what extent they are an expression of authors and audiences who belong to the Christian West of the High Middle Ages. There is not enough space here to describe the different forms this debate has taken through time (Andersson 1962; Mundal 1977; Clover 1984). One could say, however, that the opposing terms structuring it are on the one hand "ancient, autochthonous, and pagan," and on the other "recent, foreign, and Christian." The underlying idea is that thirteenth-century society and culture in Iceland and Norway were still under the influence of their pagan heritage, though they were being gradually transformed by the Church and an aristocratic culture originating in more southern parts of Europe.

In this article, an attempt will be made to reframe this question in light of recent research on the medieval self. By the early thirteenth century, when the oldest sagas studied in this chapter are believed to have been written, more than two centuries had elapsed since the conversion which took place around the year 1000. The Church was a well-organized and essential institution in the lives of Icelanders and Norwegians, who were neither less nor more Christian

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than their contemporaries in other parts of the medieval West (Orri Vésteinsson 1999). Instead of the above-mentioned terms, the argument made here will be that these sagas express a conflict of norms: between those governing the lives of lay people, more precisely laymen belonging to the dominant class, and those instituted by a Christian Church which had become more militant in this period because of the movement of *Libertas ecclesiae*. The secular norms aimed at increasing or preserving social status. The Christian norms involved the care of the soul in preparation for the afterlife.

Both sets of norms have to do with the self and its conduct within a social space, that of Nordic society in the thirteenth century. In this period, there was a significant tension between these two different sets of norms. This tension was particularly strong among the lay elite, the social group for whom the sagas seem to have been produced. It is related to a dynamic and ongoing process of change happening in medieval society at the time, not the least in Iceland. On the one hand, the royal state was being reinforced as an institution wielding power over society, on the other, the Church was attempting to reinforce its pastoral power over the laity. The sagas express this tension, as will be shown in the following pages.

A first section will present the historical developments leading to this tension between social norms and how it impacts the sense of self. Each of the four subsequent sections will focus on an individual saga text and describe how this conflict of norms is expressed within it. In conclusion, the article will discuss how this conflict of norms is constitutive of the medieval subject and is dramatized in the portrayal of the saga characters, especially those belonging to the *Íslendingasögur* genre or Sagas of Icelanders.

Two Sets of Norms

A social norm is a way of behaving and thinking defined and sanctioned by society and based on a system of reference that is both explicit and implicit. For sociologists, such as Elster, there are two types of social norms: formal norms, codified by a law or an official rule, or informal, i.e., an optional behavior which most members of a given society believe is necessary for it to function properly (Elster 2015). Norms are not necessarily codified or even expressed in words. In this respect, they are related to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus which explains how socialization shapes perceptions, attitudes, and values, and therefore practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 16–18; Torfi H. Tulinius 2014, 188–90).

The first set of social norms relevant in Iceland around the year 1200 are those that govern a community that has neither king nor any form of organized police or military. The welfare of individuals is ensured by their ability to defend themselves against attacks. In order to do so, they must rely not only on their physical and military prowess, but also on a network of relatives, friends, and allies, obliged to support them in obtaining compensation for whatever damage they may have suffered or else in exacting revenge. On this could depend the security of the individual, but also his or her honor (Byock 2001, 77–80; Miller 1988, 179–89). The medieval sagas, especially the Sagas of Icelanders, are quite often structured by these social dynamics of revenge and counter-revenge. However, these dynamics can also be observed in sagas which take place in times much closer to the time of writing, and therefore describe events that their authors and audience may have participated in or witnessed (Helgi Þorláksson 1994). This type of society therefore generates social norms, and the respect the individual enjoys in the eyes of others, as in his own, depends on his ability to conform to these norms. It is likely that these norms were at least already in place, at least in part, in the pagan society that preceded the conversion to Christianity.

Iceland converted to Christianity in the year 1000. Since then, particularly after the two episcopal seats at Skálholt and Hólar were founded, respectively, in the middle of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century, and the Church was led by members of the local dominant class, i.e., the *goðar* or chieftains, a different set of social norms was progressively being integrated by the Icelanders. This was particularly true in the period beginning at the end of the eleventh century, with the beginnings of the *libertas ecclesiae* movement in the Christian West; this movement was initiated by Pope Gregory VII at the end of the eleventh century and aimed at freeing the Church from the authority of lay rulers and exercising greater control over society. Among the consequences of this important movement, we can mention the *Peace of God*, which were the efforts of the Church to curb violence within society by instituting days or periods of the year during which fighting was prohibited, enabling leaders of the Church to open procedures of excommunication in the case of transgressions. Closely tied to this was the call for Crusades in the Holy Land, this also being a part of an attempt by the clergy to "tame" chivalry. This trend can also be seen in literature in the vernacular, which was emerging in this same period, and appeared as the idea that chivalry is a sort of vocation, comparable to that of the clergy (Verderber 2013, 24–60).

In the same period, the Church engaged in many conflicts with kings and other lay leaders concerning its authority over its own matters. A good example is the Investiture Controversy, which pitted the pope against the emperor in a fight over the power to name members of the higher clergy, or the conflict over

privilegium fori, i.e., the Church's claim to sole jurisdiction over legal matters concerning clerics (Southern 1970, 34–41).

While this was going on, the Church was taking the pastoral role of clerics as spiritual guides to laymen more seriously. New developments in religious thinking, such as Abelard's theology of intention, or the "birth of purgatory," described by Jacques Le Goff, increased the power of the Church over minds and souls (Le Goff, 1984). Indeed, the generalization of confession from the late-eleventh century onwards, made obligatory for every Christian at the 1215 Lateran Council, made demands on laymen that they examine their own inner life.

A recent book by Suzanne Verderber has demonstrated that all these developments are part of a greater change, i.e., the appearance of what Michel Foucault called "pastoral power." The Church had taken over the hearts and minds of each individual, forcing her or him to integrate new norms, which could be quite opposite to pre-existing ones and could therefore create conflicts within societies, and even within persons. Foucault called this process "subjectivation" and some have even said that the "modern subject," worrying about his sexuality and prone to self-examination, originated in this period (Verderber 2013).[1]

Christians in the thirteenth century were therefore in the process of integrating new norms, and Icelanders were no exception. Both the lay contemporary sagas and the bishop's sagas display numerous examples of warriors asking to confess their sins before dying, going to Rome to seek absolution, and giving property to the Church for the redemption of their own souls or those of family members.[2] In Iceland, we also see conflicts between the higher clergy and lay chieftains showing that the former were pursuing the same aims, and the latter were opposing the same resistance to them as in other parts of Europe.[3] Surviving

1 It is impossible to describe in detail this historical development summarized by Suzanne Verderber in her important book. Among the authors she cites are Jacques Le Goff, Michel Foucault, Walter Ullmann, Colin Morris, Peter Haidu, and several others.

2 People and events of the thirteenth century are chronicled in the compilation of contemporary sagas called *Sturlunga saga* (1988). Here are a few examples from the saga demonstrating the importance of Christianity in the lives of the lay dominant classes: Sturla Sighvatsson asked to confess to a priest in his dying moments (424). Earlier, he had gone on a pilgrimage to Rome to atone for an attack on members of the clergy (351). Some years later, his brother Þórðr gave a rich farm to the bishopric of Skálholt for the souls of their parents (548).

3 *Sturlunga saga* (1988, 214–27) describes the conflict between Bishop Guðmundur Arason and the lay chieftains about *privilegium fori*, among other matters. The biography of the bishop Þorlákur tells of the conflict between the bishop and the most powerful chieftain of the country, Jón Loftsson, concerning authority over church property and attempts by the clergy to control the sexual behaviour of the laity (*Biskupasögur* II, 2002, 175–80).

documents, such as synodal statutes and records of legal change, show that the Icelandic Church was conforming to the decrees of the universal Church.[4]

As in other parts of Europe, Icelandic society was engaged in a continuous and dynamic process. At the same time, the Icelandic chieftains were being progressively drawn into the orbit of the Norwegian royal state, which had been in crisis during most of the twelfth century but was becoming more stable and structured in the thirteenth (Ármann Jakobsson 2014). At the same time, the Church was extending its power over laymen, imposing new norms that must interiorize, though this did not happen without resistance and strife.

In the following chapters, four sagas will be examined. Two contemporary sagas show how this conflict of norms was part of the reality facing chieftains in a society where they had to use violence to preserve their power and protect themselves and their kinsmen but where the fate of their souls was also at stake in a Christian worldview. An analysis of two Sagas of Icelanders will show how this conflict of norms is thematized as one between Christianity and paganism. The conflict of norms in question was instrumental in generating an image of the self that was the product of the forces present in medieval culture.

Differing Status of Characters in Different Saga Genres

As a preliminary to the study of the four sagas, it is important to note that the status of characters from contemporary sagas is different from that of characters represented in the Sagas of Icelanders, or *Íslendingasögur*. The characters from the contemporary sagas lived in the same times as the members of the audience for whom the sagas were composed. The characters and events depicted were therefore known to this audience. This limited the freedom of the authors to allow their imagination to transform them. These limitations were far less for those who composed the *Íslendingasögur*. Unlike the contemporary sagas, the Sagas of Icelanders stage characters who belonged to the generations which settled in Iceland and their immediate descendants until shortly after the conversion of the country to Christianity around the year 1000, i.e., people living more than two centuries before they became the object of these narratives. It is

4 See, for example, synodal statutes that Bishop Magnús Gizurarson had approved at the parliament (*Alþingi*) in 1224. He is clearly applying some of the decisions taken at the Lateran Council in 1215 (*Diplomatarium Islandicum. Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn*, I, 436–37).

likely that these stories were based on authentic memories of events and people from this early period that had been transmitted orally throughout the generations. However, as shown by memory studies, collective memory reconstructs and transforms recollections, adapting them to the needs of the present.[5] It is also likely that the authors of these sagas gave themselves a certain amount of artistic license to construct their characters according to the meaning they intended to give to their stories.

The characteristics of the times in which these sagas take place gave even more freedom to the authors. It was the time in which their society, the institutions which governed it, and the power relations that structured it originated, at least to a certain extent. But it was also a period when Icelanders were still pagans, or in a process of transition from heathendom to Christianity. The result was that the fictional world of the characters of the *Íslendingasögur* allowed the expression of a certain ambiguity. This ambiguity was religious, but also moral, social, and psychological (Torfi H. Tulinius 2000). This ambiguity must have resonated with thirteenth-century Icelanders, caught in conflicts which called for violence to be exercised or revenge to be accomplished, but which went against the precepts of the Church, which also had a strong hold on their hearts and minds.

Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson's Pastoral Power

The saga of the Icelandic chieftain Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson (d. 1213), *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, is likely to have been composed in the 1240s.[6] It is the only one of the contemporary sagas devoted to the life of a lay chieftain that has been preserved as an independent work. There were other such biographical works, but they have only survived as parts of the fourteenth-century compilation known as *Sturlunga saga*. *Hrafns saga* has many remarkable aspects. Like other contemporary sagas, it narrates a struggle between lay chieftains, in this case between the main character, Hrafn, and the other major chieftain of the Westfjords

5 Maurice Halbwachs (1950) is widely considered to have founded memory studies. A recent and thorough overview of memory studies in pre-modern Scandinavia is provided by Glauser, Hermann, and Mitchell (2018).

6 In the foreword to her edition of the saga, Guðrún P. Helgadóttir presents the complex manuscript transmission of the saga, with information about the individual manuscripts. They are all considerably younger than the period of composition, for which she presents convincing arguments (*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, lxxxviii–xci and cviii–cxvi).

peninsula, Þorvaldr Snorrason. The conflict ends with Hrafn's killing by Þorvaldr's men during Lent in the year 1213 (*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 43).

The saga contains many biographical details concerning Hrafn, especially about his service as chieftain to the community. He provided hospitality to all and food to those in need. He maintained ships that ferried people over the fjord where he lived, Arnarfjörðr, and even over the much larger neighboring fjord, Breiðafjörðr. Most remarkable of all was the medical care he gave to the ailing. It is the description of Hrafn's healing that has received the most attention from scholars, who have shown that he was well abreast of developments in medical knowledge in contemporary Christian Europe (*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, xci–cviii).

Furthermore, and this is relevant to the argument developed in this article, it is noteworthy that the anonymous author of the saga uses vocabulary to describe Hrafn's chieftainship which is different from other saga authors. The word used to designate his authority over people of his region is a *hapax legomenon*: "mannavarðveizla," which means to preserve people, to defend, and even to care for them (*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 4). The other sagas use "mannaforráð," which denotes authority without the dimension of preservation or care. It is tempting to relate the choice of this term to a stronger religious dimension of this saga compared to what we know of other sagas about lay chieftains of the period (*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonr* 1987, xxv; Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2016). Indeed, *Hrafns saga* begins with a statement explaining the Christian doctrine of free will, which is unique in a saga about a layman.

Hrafn's conduct is exemplary, not least his death; in many ways, it is reminiscent of that of the martyr of the faith St. Thomas Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury who was killed by the men of Henry II Plantagenet, in one of the conflicts between members of the high clergy and lay aristocrats characteristic of the period. Other aspects of his behavior, such as reluctance to exercise violence, or the way he comports himself before his execution, remind one of St. Magnus of Orkney, a well-known character from saga literature who was revered as a saint in the whole North Atlantic region (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2016, 82).

Though implicit, this comparison places Hrafn in the context of the conflicts between Church and lay chieftains which were prominent in this period of Icelandic history. Hrafn was one of the very few members of the chieftain class who stood by the bishop Guðmundr Arason in his conflict with most of the other chieftains of the country. In contrast, Hrafn's rival for power over their home area, the Westfjords, participated enthusiastically in an attack against the bishop's seat in 1209 (*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 29). The bishop and Hrafn had been friends for a long time. Hrafn had organized and lead Guðmundr's trip to Norway where he was consecrated. In addition, Hrafn could boast of his

friendship with bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson of Orkney. He visited the islands at least twice during his lifetime (*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 2).

The choice of the word "mannavarðveizla" for the type of authority that Hrafn had over his men might be interpreted as an indication that the Church in the Nordic countries of the time was promoting a model of lay chieftain which was based on an ideal of service which was common to all of the clergy of medieval Christianity. This ideal has been studied recently by the historian Jacques Dalarun in his book *Gouverner, c'est servir* (Dalarun 2012). Closely connected to the Church's, at the time rather recent, efforts to have more control over laymen, it was legitimized by, among other passages from Scripture, that of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:3–7). Jesus explains that, like the good shepherd who is more worried about the lost sheep than those that remain in his flock, so God rejoices more over one sinner who repents than 99 others who have not sinned. Like the good shepherd, those who do God's work must care both for the community as a whole and for each sinner as an individual. Michel Foucault maintains that this idea is among a set of concepts and representations which have accumulated over centuries in our culture. Together, they form what Foucault calls western "governmentality," a "dispositive" or system of power with diverse consequences, one of them being the subjectivizing processes which created the western individual.[7]

Hrafn was not only a chieftain, but also a "good shepherd." Narrating Hrafn's life within this framework sheds light on the way the saga author qualifies two other characters: Hrafn's cousin, Ragnheiðr Aronsdóttir, who is a rich and influential widow in her community, and Þórðr Snorrason, a good chieftain who died too young, leaving the power of his area to his younger brother, Þorvaldr, who would become Hrafn's rival and eventually have him killed. The same expression is used to describe these individuals: "hvers manns gagn," i.e., of use or in service to each and all (*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 17). This confirms the existence in thirteenth-century Iceland of social norms which propose a model of behavior which was different from that shown by other representatives of the dominant classes of society.[8]

7 See Philippe Büttgen (2007) for an overview of this aspect of Foucault's thought with many useful references to Foucault's writings. Paola Rebughini (2014) discusses in detail the concepts of subject, subjectivity, and subjectivation.

8 In Torfi H. Tulinius (2016), I present my analysis of *Hrafns saga* in more detail than space allows for in this volume.

Resisting Pastoral Power: Gizurr Avenges His Family

One of the most memorable sections of *Sturlunga saga* describes the attack and burning down of the large farm of Flugumýrr in northern Iceland in 1253. It was the residence of Gizurr Þorvaldsson, one of the main chieftains of the country and a member of the Norwegian king's court, who had given him authority over this region of Iceland. He was also the descendant of many historical bishops of the country, as well as the great-great-grandson of a Norwegian king. Well-born and a talented leader of men, he had participated in many of the conflicts of this troubled period in Icelandic history. Fifteen years earlier, in 1238, he killed with his own hands the leader of the Sturlung family, Sturla Sighvatsson, in the aftermath of a battle in which Gizurr and his allies had won a decisive victory over Sturla's army. In the years that had since elapsed, the Norwegian king had increased his influence over the Icelandic dominant class, even though one more decade would pass until the Icelandic chieftains and the principal landowners swore allegiance to him (Sverrir Jakobsson 2016). In 1253, Gizurr returned to Iceland after dwelling at the Norwegian court and completing a pilgrimage to Rome to atone for sins he had committed, but about which the sources do not otherwise inform us. He now busied himself making peace with his former enemies (*Sturlunga saga* 1988, 568). In order to consolidate these new alliances, he arranged a marriage between one of his three sons, Hallr, and Ingibjörg, the daughter of Sturla Þórðarson, who by then had become one the most prominent chieftains of the Sturlung family. This Sturla is also the presumed author of the narrative which tells us of the dramatic events which followed (*Sturlunga saga* 1988, 628–50).

Some of the late Sturla Sighvatsson's closest followers did not wish to reconcile with Gizurr. This is especially true of one of his surviving daughters, who was married to Eyjólfr Þorsteinsson, an impressive warrior who had most notably distinguished himself in the warfare that took place in the 1240s when Sturla's brother, Þórðr *kakali*, lead the attack on Gizurr and his allies, and which had resulted in a temporary improvement of the position of the Sturlung family. After having been taunted in a particularly humiliating way for his unmanliness by his wife and mother-in-law, he sets out with a group of men to attack Gizurr's estate, two nights after the wedding of Gizurr's son Hallr to Ingibjörg. Most of the guests had departed and therefore only the men of Gizurr's immediate household were there to defend him, his wife, three sons, and his new daughter-in-law. They managed, however, to hold their assailants at bay until the assailants decided to burn Gizurr's hall down. The men who

escaped from the burning house were killed and the women spared. Those who stayed inside died in the flames. Gizurr was the only survivor of his family, having managed to escape against all odds. The morning after, when he returned to his manor in ruins, he found his wife and three sons all dead.

His daughter-in-law, Ingibjörg Sturludóttir, had narrowly escaped, as one of the attackers, a close cousin of the young woman, had run into the burning house to save her. The father of the young woman, who had been present at the wedding and had just recently left the region, and who tells the story, seems to take a particular interest in the resilience shown by Gizurr in these tragic circumstances. Before the charred remains of his wife and one of his sons, he says their names, as if to give them back their humanity. Despite his sorrow, he kept his composure and managed to sleep. Some weeks later, he composed a skaldic stanza in which he said that he would never know happiness again unless his wife and three sons were avenged:

> Enn mank böl þats brunnu
> bauga Hlín ok mínir,
> – skaði kennir mér minni
> minn –, þrír synir inni.
> Glaðr munat Göndlar röðla
> gnýskerðandi verða,
> – brjótr lifir sjá við sútir
> sverðs –, nema hefndir verði.
> (*Sturlunga saga* 1988, 644)[9]

However, the local higher clergy had imposed a truce upon the warring factions. Gizurr's enemies, most of whom lived in the neighboring fjord, seemed to feel that they were safe. That was when Gizurr launched an attack, killing several of his assailants, especially an important member of the Sturlung family. He now felt that he had accomplished adequate revenge and composed another stanza saying that he could now bid farewell to his grief:

> Borg lét brennuvarga
> bjórstofnandi klofna
> Sónar sex ok einum
> (sák deili þess) heila;
> bergstjóra gleðr báru
> blikstríðanda síðan
> hregg, en hafnak muggu

9 I can still remember the evil when my wife and three sons were burned inside. My loss teaches me to remember. The warrior (the breaker of swords) who lives in sorrow will not be glad unless revenge takes place. (My translation).

heldr, síst Kolbein feldum.
(*Sturlunga saga* 1988, 649)[10]

The bishop, however, was furious that Gizurr had broken the truce and excommunicated him and his men. This was of course a serious punishment for a medieval Christian, because without absolution from the Church, they would all be consigned to the eternal flames of Hell. Gizurr's decision to seek revenge was therefore a grave one, involving a huge risk. One must ask oneself why he did not await King Hákon's judgement, as the terms of the truce called for, and which his assailants had requested (*Sturlunga saga* 1988, 644).

It is also possible to reverse the question and ask what it would have meant for Gizurr not to avenge himself. It is rather likely, given the many killings that had already taken place in the previous decade and a half, that the king's arbitration would have taken into account the numerous deaths inflicted on the Sturlungar by Gizurr. His craving for revenge – extremely strong given the circumstances – would not have been alleviated (Jaffe 2011). More importantly, by accepting not to avenge his family, Gizurr would have been going against the norms of the society in which he grew up and became who he was. He would have lost the respect of his men, many of whom had also been injured or lost friends and kinsmen in the attack. Moreover, he could have thought that his enemies would not fear him as much anymore, if he did not retaliate. Finally, his own self-esteem would have been severely impaired, not only by repressing his natural inclination to avenge such a traumatic blow, but also by not behaving in accordance with social norms to which he adhered profoundly.

To do so, he was obliged to go against another set of social norms which were imposed by the Church, but to which Gizurr must also have adhered. It is in this context that his use of poetry may be understood. As shown by Jonathan Grove, skaldic stanzas which circulated between residences of chieftains and other prominent thirteenth-century Icelanders were part of what we would call "political communication" in modern terms. The authors of these stanzas are commenting on recent events, sometimes taking sides in the underlying conflicts (Grove 2008). Therefore, Gizurr's two stanzas should not be understood only as expressions of personal grief, but as public acts of communication in which he is making his pain apparent in order to garner sympathy and support for his actions beforehand and afterwards.

10 The poet (the founder of the beer of Són) had the skulls of the burners (fort of brains) cleft open. I saw it. Poetry (snow of the governor of mountains) cheers up the warrior (the breaker of gold), since Kolbeinn was slain. I refuse sadness (snowfall). (My translation).

Our sources do not tell us whether Gizurr managed to reconcile with the Church. It is probable, otherwise the king would not have given him the title of "jarl" just a few years later (*Sturlunga saga* 1988, 780). What is interesting in the context of this article is the choice between two sets of social norms made by Gizurr. For political reasons, he was forced to choose those that dominated lay society. This does not, however, mean that he could free himself of the constraints of the processes of subjectivation that had already been active for several generations in the middle of the thirteenth century. Quite the contrary, he expressed the "interiority" that religion had taught him he had, or in more foucauldian terms, his subjectivity. Indeed, his stanzas highlight his pain but also the almost therapeutic effect revenge had on him. His pain made him unable to forget the death of his wife and sons. To relieve it, revenge was necessary, and once it was obtained, he was rid of his sorrow.

The hypothesis that this way of thinking is more under the influence of recent development in society and culture, rather than being consubstantial to a culture of honor and revenge, is supported by the fact that Gizurr borrows from Cicero a crucial line in one of his stanzas. Indeed, the line "skaði kennir mér minni minn" (my loss teaches me to remember) is quite likely a reference to a ciceronian aphorism, "qui doluit, meminit" (he who suffers, remembers), which was well known in clerical circles in this period (Hermann Pálsson 1983).[11]

The two characters from contemporary sagas, Hrafn and Gizurr, chose to behave in accordance with opposite sets of social norms. Gizurr avenged his loss on his attackers, while Hrafn displayed clemency towards his attacker, Þorvaldr Snorrason, on several occasions. Þorvaldr did not, however, change his behavior, and in the end killed Hrafn.

It is likely that the almost hagiographic portrait the author of *Hrafns saga* gave of his protagonist, a few decades after his death, does not correspond entirely to reality. Hrafn may not have followed the precepts of the Church as scrupulously as he is shown to have done in the saga. It is quite likely that he also behaved often in accordance with the norms of the lay chieftain. However, the saga mentions several occasions when Hrafn's men criticize him for not killing Þorvaldr when he had the opportunity (*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 32 and 36). In addition, other sources inform us that, once they had grown up, Hrafn's sons avenged their father by killing Þorvaldr (*Sturlunga saga* 1988, 307–9). Just like Gizurr, Hrafn must have often felt the opposing pressures of the two sets of norms.

11 A more detailed analysis of this episode is to be found in Torfi H. Tulinius (2017).

Egill Skalla-Grímsson: Resisting Royal Power and Negotiating with Pastoral Power

Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar may well be the earliest major representative of the *Íslendingasögur* genre or Sagas of Icelanders (Jónas Kristjánsson 1990).[12] It was probably composed in the period between 1230 and 1240. It is a long, ambitious, and complex work. The events depicted span more than a century, though most of the focus is on its enigmatic main character, the poet and warrior, Egill Skalla-Grímsson.

It is impossible to give a satisfactory account of this great saga in the limits of a short article.[13] It begins by telling the story of a first generation of prominent Norwegians. One of the sons of the family decides to enter the service of King Harald Finehair. To begin with, he gains both glory and wealth, but soon the jealousy of courtiers and the suspicious nature of the king result in him being deprived of his position. Lacking resources to maintain his standard of living, he resorts to attacking a cargo ship belonging to the king, who in retaliation attacks his farm and kills him. His father and brother, Skalla-Grímr, avenge him by killing the king's cousins. They must leave Norway and decide to move to Iceland, which had recently been discovered. Skalla-Grímr takes for himself a large area of unsettled territory, that of the Borgarfjörðr region, dividing the land between his kinsmen and followers.

When the saga was composed, this district was dominated by his distant descendant Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241). Snorri was not only the author of king's sagas for which he is best known, but also a poet and a major chieftain in his time, as well as a high-ranking dignitary of the Norwegian court.[14] It is likely that Snorri himself composed *Egils saga*, though it is a difficult thing to prove as no medieval source attributes the saga to him. It is, however, quite certain that whoever composed it was quite close to Snorri in time and space, and that the time of writing was near the end of Snorri's life (Torfi H. Tulinius 2014, 211–7). A recent comparative study of the vocabulary of works attributed to Snorri provides additional arguments in favor of his authorship of the saga (Haukur Þorgeirsson

12 The manuscript transmission of *Egils saga* is summarized in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (2001, xix–xxi). There are three main medieval text witnesses (A, B, and C). AM 132.fol is the best representative of the A-text. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek 9. 10. Aug. 4to contains the B-text, whereas AM 462 4to and 453 4to are seventeenth-century copies of a now lost medieval manuscript.

13 All references to the text of the saga will be to Bjarni Einarsson's 2003 edition.

14 *Sturlunga saga* is the main source about Snorri's life. A recent discussion of his life and works is to be found in Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir & Helgi Þorláksson (2018).

2018). The oldest fragment of a manuscript of the saga is dated to the middle of the thirteenth century and is believed to be a copy of the original (*Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* 2001, lix). Snorri was killed in 1241. In a book published in 2014, the present author proposes a detailed reading of the saga, not only of its elaborate structure but also of how meaning is suggested by intertextual allusions, not least to stories and themes from the Bible (Torfi H. Tulinius 2014).

The main character of the saga, Egill, is the son of the first settler, Skalla-Grímr. Egill's older brother dies and Egill inherits his father's authority over the region. He is also a fierce warrior but – most importantly – an exceptionally talented practitioner of skaldic poetry. Three long poems by Egill are to be found in manuscripts of the saga, as well as a great number of individual stanzas. This would suffice to inspire Snorri and his milieu to celebrate the memory of Egill. Indeed, Snorri had united several individual chieftaincies and ruled over the area settled by Egill's father, in association with close cousins, all of which belonged to a long line of chieftains and poets descended from Skalla-Grímr. In addition, no one cultivated the art of skaldic poetry more than Snorri and his entourage. Though best known for the mythological information it gives, Snorri's *Edda* is above all a treatise on skaldic poetics (Guðrún Nordal & Jon Gunnar Jørgensen 2018, 454–8).

Nevertheless, the few sources mentioning Egill, other than the saga, all seem to be dependent on it. That is why it is very likely that the story of Egill and his family reflects the outlook and concerns of the Sturlung clan around 1240, a period in which its members are in a deep crisis. As was said earlier, their chieftain Sturla Sighvatsson had been defeated and killed in battle in 1238, alongside Sturla's father, Sighvatr, who was Snorri's older brother, as well as several of Sighvatr's other sons. In the decade and a half preceding this battle, the solidarity of the clan had been severely tested by the conflicting ambitions of Snorri and his nephew Sturla, both of whom had strong links to the Norwegian court and were in a position to rule Iceland in the king's name. Indeed, tensions had run so high between these close relatives that violence had erupted on several occasions, culminating in Sturla's invasion of Snorri's domain on Palm Sunday 1236, forcing his uncle to flee. After a battle between Sturla's and Snorri's followers, among them his close maternal cousins who ruled over the southern part of the Borgarfjörðr distict, Snorri resolved to sail to Norway where he stayed at the court of Duke Skúli, father-in-law of the king and former regent of the throne, but who was now competing with his son-in-law, King Hákon, for power over the country.[15]

15 The conflict between King Hákon and his father-in-law, Duke Skúli, is described in detail in a work composed by another of Snorri's nephews, Sturla Þórðarson, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*.

When news arrived in Norway about Sturla's defeat in 1238, Snorri hastened back to Iceland, even though King Hákon had ordered him to stay. During the remaining few years of his life, he seems to have made every possible attempt to reconcile the surviving members of the Sturlung family, while he was simultaneously re-establishing his authority over the western part of Iceland. This involved, among other things, arranging a marriage between one of the two surviving sons of his brother, Tumi Sighvatsson, to his own sister-in-law, Þuríðr Ormsdóttir, a member of the prestigious Oddaverjar family. The wedding was celebrated in Reykholt, Snorri's residence (*Sturlunga saga* 1988, 433). Sources tell us that wedding feasts among the upper echelons could take many days, even a whole week (Árni Björnsson 1996, 230). In the book on *Egils saga*, mentioned above, it is suggested that the saga may have been composed to be read aloud to entertain the guests at the wedding (Torfi H. Tulinius 2014, 262–6). It is known that saga material was used to entertain guests at social gatherings in this period (Torfi H. Tulinius 2018, 393–4). They could be told or read aloud. *Egils saga* is long enough to read in hour-long instalments for the five to seven evenings of the wedding feast. As has already been noted, it narrates the time period that defines the social identity of the social group present at the wedding. In addition, in the main part of the saga, the one devoted to the life of the main protagonist, Egill, subtle allusions are made to the fratricidal conflicts that had torn the clan apart for more than a decade (Torfi H. Tulinius 2014, 223–55).

Indeed, if Egill is a pagan, the saga also suggests that he is a sinner in the Christian sense. This is done by developing a complicated plot, interlacing the account of two conflicts. The more visible one is that between Egill and the Norwegian king Eiríkr *blóðöx*, but another more hidden one opposes him to his older brother and father. An indirect result of this conflict is the death of the brother during a battle fought in England. This allows Egill to marry his brother's widow and inherit his position and wealth. Egill's responsibility is indicated using intertextual allusions to the Bible, most prominently to the story of King David, which had multiple meanings for medieval Christians. David was one of the Righteous of the Old Testament, which meant that his soul would be saved on Judgement Day; he was a great founding poet, as well as a sinner, because he had conspired to have the husband of the woman he lusted after killed in battle. David was punished for this sin by the death of his first-born. He also composed the seven penitential psalms, which were recited by medieval sinners after confession and atonement (Vincent 2000).

The slaying of Skúli by Hákon's men is described on pp. 113–15. See also Hans Jacob Orning (2018) for a recent analysis of their conflict.

As is demonstrated in the book about the saga, the author of Egill's life weaves into it subtle allusions to the story of David (Torfi H. Tulinius 2014, 97–110). The intended readers or audience of the sagas, at least many of them, cultivated skaldic poetry, an art of intertextuality if ever there was. Many of them also belonged to the clergy or had received some degree of clerical training. They would have understood the subtleties of biblical exegesis. They were therefore capable of perceiving the underlying allusions to David and understand them in the context of the history of salvation. Like David, Egill had a chance of being admitted to Paradise, even though he lived his whole life before the conversion, the equivalent in Icelandic history to the Incarnation in the history of humanity. His chances of going to Heaven were even greater, as he had received the *prima signatio*, a sort of shorter baptism (Harris & Hill 1989, 116; Torfi H. Tulinius 2014, 66–67). The narrative at the end of the saga of three places where his bodily remains are laid to rest signify his intermediary status in terms of medieval Christian thinking. He is first buried in a pagan gravemound, then moved, when Iceland converts to Christianity, to a recently built church. A century and a half later, the church is being moved and Egill's bones are discovered under the altar. That is not an appropriate place for someone who had only been prime-signed, and his bones are moved once again to the outskirts of the cemetery, which is the prescribed resting place for the bones of those having only received the shorter baptism in the Icelandic law of the thirteenth century (Torfi H. Tulinius 2014, 2–7).

Egill is therefore ambiguous, and it is this ambiguity which is of interest to the present article. On the surface, he seems to adhere exclusively to the norms of the ruling society before the Church began to transform hearts and minds: honor, revenge, fidelity to one's kin. However, the author suggests that Egill's story must also be understood in the context of the norms promoted by the Church. This ambiguity must have appealed to Snorri's entourage, and more generally to the social group it belonged to. Like Snorri himself, who may well have conspired to have his nephew killed, many members of his social group had found themselves in an ambiguous position in relation to these two sets of norms which governed their lives (*Sturlunga saga* 1988, 316–8).

Conflict of Norms and Tragedy: Gunnarr and Flosi

Egill is a literary character, even though he is based on the memory of a real person who lived two to three centuries before the saga was composed. However, he is not a tragic hero. His life was full of dramatic events, but he lived to an

advanced old age and died peacefully. The world of the sagas is nevertheless full of what could be called tragic characters. The most remarkable of these is without doubt Gunnarr Hámundarson, one of the main characters of *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Gunnarr and another figure of the saga will be the topic of this concluding section.

Gunnarr died at the hands of his enemies after a heroic battle which he had fought alone against 80 men who had surrounded his farm. The country was still pagan, and Gunnarr is buried in a grave-mound close by. As mentioned above, Egill had received a sort of shorter baptism and was at least partly Christian, as is indicated by his final resting place on the outskirts of a Christian cemetery. Gunnarr's burial in a mound confirms that he lived all his life as a pagan. Shortly after his death, he is seen inside his mound, bathed in a supernatural light. He is gaily chanting a skaldic stanza where he declares his happiness at having fought his enemies (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 191–4).

This paranormal scene could be interpreted as a commentary made by the author. Gunnarr represents the norms of a society that is ruled by a code of honor which demands that the individual and those to whom he is bound by familial or other ties take up arms against their mutual enemies. That is how the apparition is understood by Gunnarr's friend Skarphéðinn, who offers his help to Gunnarr's son in his quest for revenge. However, Gunnarr is a much more complex character than that, for he has on many occasions shown remarkable restraint and been willing to forgive those who had offended him. On one occasion, he even abstained from asking for compensation for the killing of a close member of his family, so as not to jeopardize his friendship with Njáll and his sons. His cousin had gravely offended his friends by composing and reciting scurrilous verse at their expense (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 118).

Gunnarr is in this sense full of contradictions. Despite his exceptional prowess as a fighter, he is also introspective, confessing to his brother at one point that he sometimes asks himself if he is less of a man than others because it pains him to kill people (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 138–9). It is as if the author had wanted to represent what the Swedish scholar Lars Lönnroth has called the "noble heathen," i.e., someone to whom the true religion has not been revealed but feels the murmurings of a Christian conscience (Lönnroth 1969). Using the concepts that have been proposed in this article, he follows the norms of a society based on revenge but feels obscurely the pressure of the norms advocated by the Church.

Like many representatives of this saga genre, *Njáls saga* includes a narrative of the conversion of Iceland to Christianity, to which it devotes several chapters (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 255–72). The change of religion does not, however, lead to a decrease in violence. Instead, the most serious acts of violence in the saga take place afterwards. This is particularly true of the burning down of Njáll's

farm, resulting in his death and that of his wife and three sons. *Njáls saga* is much too complex a work for it to be analyzed here. For the needs of the argument proposed in this article, one more example will be taken, that of Flosi, the chieftain who ordered the attack and burning down of the farm.

Flosi is not introduced into the saga until the second half. To begin with, his role is secondary. However, his role increases progressively, and as the saga ends, he has become one of the two main protagonists. Its final episode tells how he disappears at sea, on his way back from Norway as an old man (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 463).[16]

As the plot develops, Flosi is confronted with a terrible choice. He is the most powerful chieftain of his kin-group. Njáll's sons having killed the husband of his niece, and social norms dictate that he must either demand compensation or exact revenge. A wise man, capable of restraint, he prefers the former option. His niece, however, wants blood to be shed for the killing of her husband and does not even refrain from invoking Flosi's masculinity in an attempt to force him into action (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 291). He resists for a while, but during a scene where his manliness is again being insulted, he cannot restrain himself, which results in a settlement being impossible between the two factions (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 313–4). He has no choice but to attack Njáll's farm, but his sons and their men defend it valiantly. They cannot be vanquished and soon they will be receiving help from neighbors. The only way Flosi can overcome his enemies is to burn down the farm with his enemies inside. If he does not, he knows that he and his men will be made to pay dearly for the failed attack. The saga presents the alternatives facing Flosi as one between burning down their enemies' farm or facing certain death for themselves. Flosi adds: "It is a great responsibility before God, as we are ourselves Christian" (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 328).

The chain of events has forced this tragic choice on Flosi. Unlike Gunnarr, who is still a pagan, he knows what his religion calls for him to do. He understands he is about to commit a terrible sin. He also understands that his social role as leader of men, and responsible for their safety, demands that he commit it. The parallel is striking between Flosi, who is a fictional character, though a person with this name probably existed, and the historical figure Gizurr Þorvaldsson, who was discussed above.[17] He also had to choose between two sets of norms, the ones a lay leader of men must follow, and those

16 On the motif of accepted death in the saga, see my article "Seeking Death in *Njáls saga*" (Torfi H. Tulinius 2015).

17 The numerous parallels between the dramatic events of the middle of the thirteenth century and those described in *Njáls saga* have often been commented on. The most detailed study conducted on these parallels remains Barði Guðmundsson's (1958).

to whom a Christian subject must submit. The difference between Gizurr, who was a person of flesh and blood known to the author of the saga, and Flosi, who is a more or less imaginary character from a relatively distant past, is that the author *Njáls saga* is able to suggest more about the inner life of his characters through his choice of what he tells us.

Concluding Remarks

These four examples from two types of sagas show that the old debate between autochthonous elements and foreign influences, or paganism and Christianity, can be formulated in different terms with good results. The stories composed by the saga authors, both about the present and the past, were shaped by the conflict between the norms they felt under pressure to obey. The contemporary sagas are a unique source for those interested in the development of the medieval subject, in the way they present real-life characters in their attempts to negotiate between the demands of the social world to which they belonged and the equally demanding representations of the afterlife where their behavior in their lifetimes would be judged on the basis of the values promoted by the Church. The members of the dominant class of Icelanders in the thirteenth century were therefore beset by the contradictions inherent in this conflict of norms. The friction inherent in this situation is constitutive of the medieval subject or self.

The Sagas of Icelanders, or *Íslendingasögur*, telling of events taking place in the period in which their society was being founded, gave the thirteenth-century authors the opportunity to communicate with their audience about this conflict of norms which many of their contemporaries must have experienced. The image of the past drawn up by these authors created a fictional space in which the ambivalent feelings Icelanders had for these norms were explored. The heroes of the Sagas of Icelanders are products or expressions of the ambivalent attitude medieval Icelanders had towards their own self within the social space with all its conflicting demands. Their narratives about the period in which their social world originated provided them with a novelistic mental space in which they could explore these contradictions without experiencing the discomfort of looking at themselves. In the words of the great modern novelist Milan Kundera, the saga authors had created "a territory where moral judgements were suspended" (Kundera 1993, 17).

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The Selfish Skald: The Problematic Case of the Self of the Poet of *Sonatorrek*

Abstract: The poem *Sonatorrek*, a poem on the loss of kin, attributed to the tenth-century skáld Egill Skalla-Grímsson, is the object of this study. The main objective of the first part of the article is to discuss the methodological problems related to discerning the context where the poem was composed. The attributions of the poem to the tenth century poet Egill, as well as to the thirteenth-century context of the composition of his saga, are difficult to sustain from the extant seventeenth-century manuscript material. We must therefore consider at least three possible contexts for the composition of the poem. From this reasoning it is clear that we cannot establish with any certainty whether the representation of self in the extant text witnesses should be regarded as part of a tenth-, a thirteenth-, or even a seventeenth-century context. The second part of the article treats *Sonatorrek* as a representation of self, set in the various contexts that can be discerned from the source-critical discussion.

Keywords: skaldic poetry, sagas of skalds, oral poetry, manuscript culture, source criticism

The poem *Sonatorrek*, a poem on the loss of kin attributed to the tenth-century skáld Egill Skalla-Grímsson and usually read in connection with the prose narrative about the poet, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, is the object of this study. The main objective concerns the methodological problems related to discerning the context where the poem was composed. The attribution to the Viking Age poet Egill, as well as the medieval context of the saga, are difficult to establish with any certainty. We must consider at least three possible contexts at widely different points in time for the composition of the poem: first, the tenth century of Egill himself, where the context is established with the help of the thirteenth-century saga; second, the thirteenth century of the saga writer, which would indicate that the poem was composed either in the allegedly oral tradition about the old poet or as part of creating the narrative about him; or third, the only context where the poem is extant today, the seventeenth-century manuscripts named Ketilsbækur (AM 453 4to and AM 462 4to). A central task for anyone who wishes to study the

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representation of the self in historical material in general, arguably, must be to discuss the implications of the state of the preservation in order to contextualize the material. This is definitely the case concerning *Sonatorrek*. These issues will be addressed in the first part of this article.

The second part of the article will consider *Sonatorrek* as a representation of *self*, set in the various contexts that can be established from the extant information. Can the representation of a self related to any particular context in space and time in the poem be established with any certainty? Arguably, we need to address the question of whether the representation of self that appears in the extant text witnesses should be regarded as part of a tenth-, a thirteenth- or even a seventeenth-century context. It should be stated here that, obviously, this study should be seen as highly tentative. It must also be made clear at this point that, when whatever obstacles of time and state of the extant material are satisfactorily removed, it is still not certain what representation of self is actually encountered. The poet is in any instance an individual with a personal objective with his poem, whether he is called Egill Skalla-Grímsson or considered to be a later, but still impressive poet.

Sonatorrek and Its Context(s)

In most cases, skaldic poetry is today found in relation to prose narratives about Norwegian kings (Kings' sagas) and Icelandic individuals and families (Sagas of Icelanders). The poems, however, are considered to be written down from a long oral tradition and incorporated into the prose narratives only at a later stage in the thirteenth century. A skaldic poem is generally composed in a highly complicated form and the imagery is rather accomplished. This makes it plausible, according to the prevailing opinion among scholars, to think that the poems have survived the long period of oral transmission more or less unchanged. It is important to point out, however, that the poem under investigation here is not composed in the complicated meter of *dróttkvætt* but in the considerably more open meter of *kvíðuháttr*.

There are a number of methodological problems challenging the scholar who is interested in the representation of the self as found in the Old Norse poetry. The first obstacle to be treated here has to do with the transmission of the poems allegedly composed by poets in an oral tradition from the tenth and eleventh centuries. This obstacle needs to be seen in stages. First, we need to ask ourselves if the poems really are from these ancient days and from a long and undisturbed oral tradition. It goes without saying that this first problem is in itself more or less

unsolvable, as oral tradition per definition is a rather mute source, but it nevertheless needs to be addressed. A second problem concerns the poetic tradition in manuscript culture. In the context where a modern reader encounters the poems, they are merged with prose narratives, in the kings' sagas relating the stories of how poets entered the courts of kings and made their fortune there, or in the Sagas of Icelanders where the poets themselves are central, e.g., Egill Skalla-Grímsson in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* or Kormákr in *Kormáks saga*.[1] An a priori understanding of the alleged tenth-century poets' representation of their selves arguably could not be based on these narratives from the thirteenth or even fourteenth centuries; in order to understand the Viking Age poets, we need to base our analysis rather on the poems themselves, and attempt to free our reading from what we know from the narratives.

An often neglected, or even unacknowledged obstacle to our understanding is found in the various modern editions of the extant poetry. The attributions of poems to individual poets are made in the saga narratives, and it is most likely that this is where a reader first encounters the poetry of the skálds. This means that, at the outset, a modern reader has already formed a first impression from the prose narrative context. Is it at all possible to free oneself from the narrative in *Egils saga* about Egill's loss of two sons and how he was persuaded by his daughter to compose an elegy for them, an *erfikvæði*? But the editions of the poems as separate entities, such as Finnur Jónsson's from the early twentieth century or the new edition currently being published, also take as a starting point the attributions to individual poets provided by the sagas. Further, the collection of poems in print as a modern book of poetry does not enhance our understanding of the oral culture where they were allegedly composed.

In the medieval context of the saga about Egill, as will be seen below, there are only a few traces of what we call *Sonatorrek*, as it is only preserved to a large extent in much later manuscripts. But in the editions of the saga, as well as in editions of separate poems, it is presented as a full, medieval poem.

It could also be relevant to ask who, in the tenth or eleventh century, would have known all these poems and remembered all the attributions to earlier poets? Was there ever a "reader" of skaldic poetry who resembled the modern scholar? All too often, this oral tradition is understood from a rather anachronistic perspective where texts are considered to be available in a canon, a situation hardly

1 The anthology *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets* edited by Russell Poole (2001) provides many insightful and relevant chapters by leading scholars on the problems related to skaldic poetry in the saga context.

applicable to the late-Viking Age tradition. This last methodological problem leads to an issue of a more theoretical nature concerning our understanding of concepts such as *poet*, *poetry*, and the central concept of our book, that is, the *self*. When aware of the methodological obstacles mentioned above, this must also lead to an awareness of the otherness of both the distant oral tradition of the poets (or perhaps rather the context of poets in this tradition) and the manuscript tradition in which one encounters the narratives as well as the poems in writing. Therefore this question of otherness must be addressed before taking at face value any statements that seem to provide presentations of a self in the poetry.

The poem *Sonatorrek* is, as mentioned above, today extant only in two post-Reformation paper manuscripts, the so called Ketilsbækur, AM 453 4to and AM 462 4to, dated to the seventeenth century and produced by Árni Magnússon's maternal grandfather, Ketill Jörundsson.[2] A single stanza (st. 1) is extant in the codex usually forming the base for editions of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Möðruvallabók, AM 132 fol, dated to *c*. 1330–1370. Another two stanzas are preserved in manuscripts of the prose *Edda* and with attributions to Egill Skalla-Grímsson (st. 22 and 23).[3] All text witnesses to the stanzas in the prose *Edda* are dated to the fourteenth century or later.

The relation between the extant poetry and the various contexts can be illustrated in the *Stemma Carminis* as in Fig. 1, below. Here, the earliest contexts must be no more than hypothetical. The oral state of the poem cannot be established with any certainty from the extant written sources. Only two full stanzas and four lines of a third are represented in medieval manuscripts, in all cases with clear reference to the saga poet Egill Skalla-Grímsson. In the text witness to *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* in Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol), it is stated that Egill was persuaded to compose a poem for his two dead sons:

> Egill s(eger) at þat var þa vuænt at hann munde þa yrkia mega þott hann leitaðe við. En freista ma ek þess s(eger) hann. Egill hafði þa átt son er Gvnnarr het ok hafði sa ok andaz litlu aðr. Ok er þetta upphaf kuæðis. (*Egils saga* A, 149)

> [Egill says that it should not be expected that he would have the power to compose even if he tried. But I will try, he says. Egill had a son called Gunnarr and he had also died a little earlier. And this is the beginning of the poem.] (My translation)

This statement is followed by the first stanza. The two stanzas found in the manuscripts of the prose *Edda* are, as mentioned, attributed to Egill by the

2 For a thorough description of these manuscripts, see *Egils saga C*, xxiii–xxxvi.

3 Only lines 1–4 of stanza 23 are extant in this source. Note that the numbering of the stanzas of *Sonatorrek* throughout this chapter follows that of the edition in *Egils saga C*.

surrounding prose (see *Skáldskaparmál*, 9) with the short phrase "Sva kvað Egill Skallagrímsson" (Egill Skalla-Grímsson composed) but with no reference to a poem called *Sonatorrek*. From the medieval evidence, it can therefore safely be concluded that there was a tradition for attributing these three stanzas to Egill, even if it was not necessarily to the poem *Sonatorrek*. This does not, however, mean that the rest of the stanzas could be attributed to the same poet, even if the seventeenth-century manuscripts where the poem is presented in full suggest that the whole poem at one point in time has been considered his composition. It is interesting to note that the latter manuscripts actually have a similar phrase referring to an introductory stanza as Möðruvallabók, even though it presents a full poem. The question is what implications this should have for our contextualization of the poem. It has been suggested that the poem as we find it in AM 453 4to and AM 462 4to is based on an exemplar going back to *c*. 1400 (see, e.g., *ÍF* 2, 245, n. 1). In the apparatus of the recent edition of C, the editor concludes that "kun 1. strofe af kvadet Sonatorrek citeres i A og B; resten må være interpoleret i arketypen *C el. en efterkommer deraf, allersenest i hyparketypen *c^1."[4] This would indicate that this lost codex either introduced the full poem without changing the introductory phrase or that the poem was introduced later, possibly even in direct connection with the re-writing in the two extant Ketilsbækur. The implications of this could be twofold. Either the poem as we know it has never existed in a medieval written form and was added to the saga narrative at a later state, or it had existed in a medieval manuscript used as one of the exemplars for the re-writing of the saga in Ketilsbækur or their exemplar, where one of the exemplars had the phrase followed by the first stanza while the other exemplar had the full poem. If the first alternative is chosen, this could indicate that the full poem is a rather late addition to the tradition. If, on the other hand, the poem in full is assumed to have been extant in one of the exemplars for Ketilsbækur or in an earlier exemplar, the question must be addressed why the phrase indicating a single stanza has been kept.[5]

4 "Only the 1st stanza of the poem *Sonatorrek* is quoted in A and B; the rest must be interpolated in the archetype *C or a later copy of it, at the latest in the hyparchetype *c1" (*Egils saga C*, 142–3; my translation).

5 The phrase "Ok er þetta upphaf kuæðis" introducing a single stanza (Norse *lausavísa*) or a single introductory stanza, as in *Sonatorrek*, has been thoroughly treated by Judy Quinn (1997). See also Margaret Clunies Ross for a treatment of the poetry in *Egils saga* in relation to the narrative prose (2010).

The state of the extant text witnesses and the implications of speculations of later text critics are very well described by Russell Poole in a recent article:

> Only two witnesses of the complete poem have survived, both very late, and the text they supply is evidently in a badly damaged and garbled state. It may also be, as Hollander suggested, that the poem was difficult even for contemporaries of its author, perhaps as a calculatedly virtuoso piece. Additionally, there is the distraction caused by nineteenth- and twentieth-century text critical adventurism: critics routinely cite passages from the purported text that are little more than free-ranging fantasies on the part of such scholars as Finnur Jónsson, E. A. Kock, Hallvard Lie and Magnus Olsen. (Poole 2010, 173)

Poole goes on to argue for the historical Egill Skalla-Grímsson as the poet responsible for composing the poem. He contends that Egill (based on references to the saga) could have been "representative of his class," influential in Iceland and with claims in Norway, active as "a mercenary fighting on various sides in England and Denmark, and as an iterant poet" (Poole 2010, 176). Poole further accepts the saga narrative's tale of Egill's relation to the Anglo-Saxon king Æthelstan as an indication that "the historical Egill" was well aware of Christian ideas of the tenth century and would have been able to transform those ideas into the *kviðuháttr* of *Sonatorrek* (Poole 2010, 183–99). The Christian influences that he distinguishes do not, according to Poole, point in the direction of a later time of conception, but rather must be seen as early contacts with Christians by a "historical Egill" in the tenth century (see, e.g., Poole 2010, 193–4).[6]

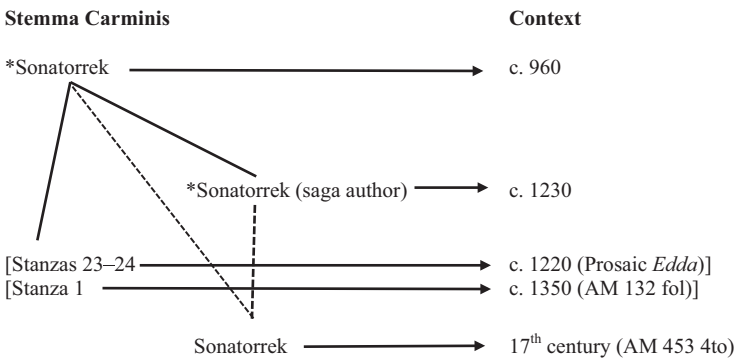

Fig. 1: *Stemma Carminis* and the possible contexts of *Sonatorrek*.

6 If the relations between *Sonatorrek* and tenth- and eleventh-century poetry from Anglo-Saxon England noted by Russell Poole are seen in the light of what we know about the earliest period of writing in the vernacular in Iceland and Norway, i.e., the twelfth and early thirteenth century, this could indicate a completely different, but possible implication of his reasoning. It could be argued that these Anglo-Saxon poetics, as well as Christian

Earlier Views of *Sonatorrek* and the Skald

In the scholarship of *Sonatorrek*, there have been many different views on its status and how it could be interpreted. The standard appreciation of the poem considers it to be a lamentation over the lost son(s). None of the interpretations, however, have been done independent of the prose narrative; it seems that no one ever doubted this narrative about the events that lead up to the composition of the poem that the saga itself refers to as *Sonatorrek*. An example of this steady belief in the saga narrative in which the poem has been embedded can be found in Daniel Sävborgs statement:

> Ett verk av Egill utmärker sig i fråga om sorg framför alla andra. Det gäller *Sonatorrek*, diktad ca 960 med anledning av två av Egills söners död. *Sonatorrek* är en regelrätt sorgdikt; det är sorgen som är dess huvudtema från första till sista (25:e) strofen. (Sävborg 1997, 134)

> [One work by Egill is exceptional in its expression of sorrow. That is *Sonatorrek*, composed around 960 in relation to the death of the two sons of Egill. *Sonatorrek* is a lamentation after the book; sorrow forms the main theme from the first to the last (25.) stanza.] (My translation)

The scholar seems here to take the saga account almost at face value. It is therefore interesting to note how this effects the evaluation of the poem as an expression of grief, the traditional understanding. If we scrutinize the poem we find, however, that the poem itself does not mention the two sons by name and it does not really express any deeper sorrow; it is only in the narrative context of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* that the deaths of Bǫðvarr and Gunnarr are recounted, whereas the poem itself rather focuses on the poet's position and loss of control. The narrator relates the long story of how Bǫðvarr drowns and how this leads Egill to withdraw into his sleeping chamber to starve himself to death, and how his daughter Þorgerðr persuades him to compose the poem. And then, as if by some afterthought, it is stated that "Egill hafði þá átt son, er Gunnarr hét, ok hafði sá ok andazk litlu áðr" (Egill had another son named Gunnarr who had also died a little earlier) (ÍF 2, 245). Was this son added just to comply with the plural of the name *Sonatorrek*, or was the death of Gunnarr perhaps less dramatic? After the first stanza, the narrative states that Egill got better and that he "lét [. . .] erfa sonu sína eptir fornri siðvenju" (arranged the inheritance after his sons according to the old customs) (Íf 2, 257). Again, the plural is marked to comply with the poem seemingly mentioning two sons.

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ideas, were most likely influential in the twelfth century when the earliest vernacular texts were composed.

An earlier example of this acceptance of the saga narrative can be found in the work of Sigurður Nordal (1924), who argues that the poem relates the personal crisis of Egill after the loss of sons, and the poet's way of healing himself. His reasoning is based on the prose narrative without even addressing the possibility of it being a later fiction.

The perspective of healing is also dealt with by Bo Ralph. He analyzes the poem as it relates to religious beliefs and argues that it represents a time when skaldic poetry was strongly connected with religious practices. Ralph places the poet and his skills in a mythic-religious context in the pre-Christian period. In his introduction to the reasoning, Ralph does argue that the prose narrative should not be taken at face value, but still the pre-Christian (or "pagan") religious beliefs that he suggests are based on this text composed in the thirteenth century not on the supposedly Viking Age poem. This leads him to draw conclusions from written sources formed in a Christian context in the same way as most earlier scholars. In his further discussion, Ralph often, against his own statement, returns to the saga narrative for supportive arguments. It turns out that it is difficult not to be influenced by the narrative that is so well known to the scholar.

Ralph makes an important point that Bǫðvarr (who is not mentioned by name in the poem, only in the prose narrative) is not the theme of the poem, but that it rather is Egill himself who is the focus (but it could be objected that Egill is not mentioned in the poem, only the anonymous poet (*ek*), and his *habitus* can only be established from the prose narrative):

> Huvudsyftet är inte att hugfästa den unge Bǫðvars duglighet. Dikten är ett vittnesmål om Egils eget sista desperata försök att återupprätta sin ställning som magiker; han vill återfå förmågan att påverka de metafysiska krafterna. (Ralph 1976, 164)

> [The main objective [of the poem] is not to establish the abilities of the young Bǫðvarr. The poem is a witness to Egill's last and desperate attempt to re-establish his position as a magician; he wishes to regain his ability to steer the metaphysical powers.]
> (My translation)

I agree with Ralph that we need to analyze the poem separately but cannot see that he actually manages to follow this intention. Further, I also agree with Ralph that the poem has its own poet (or poets) as the main object of interest. The dead kin are only mentioned as loss of support and position, not as missed persons.

Torfi H. Tulinius (2004) would rather place the poet in a thirteenth-century European tradition and argues (2004, 112) that a thirteenth-century poet trained in the tradition as described in the prose *Edda* could very well have composed the poem in the place of Egill Skalla-Grímsson. The individual sorrow and positioning of the poet would then rather be seen as a thirteenth-century sentiment or, perhaps more correctly, a reconstruction of what a thirteenth-century

person thought would be representative of a tenth-century poet. By 2001, Torfi H. Tulinius had pointed out biblical references in the poem. It is interesting to note, however, that he more or less concludes that the saga writer is identical to the poet, which would explain the intertextuality between the poem and the surrounding prose (see, e.g., 2001, 215). He concludes:

> Given the reasonable doubt exists as to the poem's pagan status and taking into account the significance the saga author seems to have ascribed to Egill's life story, especially the way he models him partly on the figure of King David, it is noteworthy that twelfth-century Latin poetry includes works composed in the name of male figures from the Old Testament. (Torfi H. Tulinius 2001, 215)

Given that Torfi H. Tulinius argues for a dating of the poem contemporary to the saga narrative, it is of course reasonable to look for the relation between prose and poetry as parts of an original composition. It does not, however, exclude the possibility of understanding the poem as a considerably later composition added where the original writer had only planned to provide a single introductory stanza, as the preceding prose suggests.

More recently, Joseph Harris (2010) has discussed the poem in relation to myths from the perspective of Mircea Eliade. He argues for cautiousness due to the state of the text but concludes that we should not be overly cautious.

> Caution is in order, but too much caution is paralysing, and after all Egill did leave a very large corpus of poetry, in which his own voice speaks across the ages, preserved in oral tradition until recorded in writing at various times. Among the few items of Egill's surviving oevre that have been *reasonably* suspected of later authorship, *Sonatorrek* does not number – for most scholars. (Harris 2010, 153)

Harris argues for a reading of the narrative context as representative of some kind of memory of myth and ritual. This is arguably problematic and rather difficult to sustain when the discrepancies between narrative and poetry are taken into account. It is, for example, interesting that there is no mention of either Bǫðvarr or Gunnarr in the poem itself. There are no names mentioned from the saga context whatsoever. And perhaps even more problematic: Egill's kin is not at all coming to an end if we are to believe the saga narrative, as his third son Þorsteinn is alive and well. Harris has a problem concerning how to define the poem generically. He states: "Egill's poem may anticipate nineteenth-century lyrical sensibilities, but it, like every work of art, must also be a product of its time" (Harris 2010, 156). This is relevant in relation to the representation of self. The poet seems to express individual feelings, lyrical sensibilities that would not be expected in literary compositions of the pre-modern period. On the other hand, this could possibly be a reflection of a poet not too much affected by Christian piety. But again, the elegiac aspects of the poem are problematic; rather, the poet

expresses a self that is occupied primarily by the rational aspects of its own pain, loss, and the problems caused by the death of the son and other family members. His main objective seems to be to position himself and his own importance.

In 2015, a full volume, *Egil, the Viking Poet* (Looze et al. 2015) was dedicated to an examination of the poet Egill Skalla-Grímsson and his poetry. Here a number of scholars discussed the self of the Viking Age poet (e.g., Clunies Ross 2015; Looze 2015). Yet it may be maintained that it is still problematic to move beyond the written evidence, and it is obvious from the contributions to this volume that there is no consensus among scholars about the provenance and role of poetry in the saga (see, e.g., Torfi H. Tulinius 2015).

Sonatorrek Revisited

The extant poem found in Ketilsbækur consists of 24 stanzas where the edition in *Íslensk fornrit* divides the poem into 25 stanzas. As pointed out by Russell Poole (2010), the status of the preserved text is problematic to say the least, and in many cases later text criticism has made emendations that most scholars today accept (often without even realizing the problem) when interpreting the poem. The second stanza provides good examples of this.

2. *Egils saga C* (143) Edition in *ÍF 2* (246–7)

Era **andþeizt**	Esa auðþeystr,
þvïat ecke velldur	þvít ekki veldr
haufuglegr	hǫfugligr,
ür higgju stad	ór hyggju stað
fagna fundr	fagna fundr
þriggja nidja	Friggjar niðja
ärborinn	ár borinn
ür iǫtun heimum	ór Jǫtunheimum.

[It is not easily forced from the place of thought – sorrow is the cause – the poetry, borne long ago from the land of giants.] (My translation of the *ÍF* text)

In *Lexicon Poeticum* (*LP*, 23), Finnur Jónsson makes a reference from *andþeyst* (normalized form of *andþeizt* as found in the manuscript) to *auðþeystr*, where he states the meaning as "let at sætte i stærk fart" (easy to bring in high speed) without mentioning that this later form actually is based on his own emendation in *Skj* B I (34). The word that is found in the manuscript would mean something like

"speed against," which makes less sense in the overall interpretation on which Finnur Jónsson based his emendation. It is interesting to note, however, that neither the form found in the manuscript nor the one suggested by Finnur Jónsson is found in other instances; both are *hapax legomena*, one of them found in a seventeenth-century manuscript, the other created by a twentieth-century philologist!

The second marked word in the example, "þriggja" (three), is emended in the manuscript to *Friggjar* by Finnur Jónsson, introducing the goddess Frigg in a kenning *Friggjar niðjar* referred to in *Lexicon Poeticum* as an existing kenning (found only in *Sonatorrek* as edited by Finnur Jónsson, but treated as an authentic kenning in *LP*, 427). Would the original form of the manuscript make any sense? The second part of the stanza could be translated as "the joyful meeting of three kinfolk early carried from Jotunheim." This introduces a group of kinfolk that would need to be interpreted. Perhaps a possible solution could be sought in the prose *Edda*, where there are a number of examples of three gods involved in processes of creation or origin, for example, Óðinn, Vili, and Vé (*Gylfaginning* 1988, 11–13) in the creation of the world and the first humans. Another possible interpretation of the kenning could be related to what is recounted about the creation and retrieving of the poetic mead from the giant Suttungr in *Skáldskaparmál* (3–5). The mead is poured into three vessels, Óðreyrir, Són, and Boðn, by two dwarfs before it is given to Suttungr. Óðinn, using the name Bǫlverkr, arrives at the place Suttungr is and obtains the mead through foul play and brings it to the gods. The prose *Edda* states:

> En Suttungs mjǫð gaf Óðinn Ásunum ok þeim mǫnnum er yrkja kunnu. Því kǫllum v[ér] skáldskapinn feng Óðins ok fund ok drykk hans ok gjǫf hans ok drykk Ásanna.
>
> (*Skáldskaparmál*, 5)

> [And Óðinn gave Suttung's beer to the Æsir and those men who could compose poetry. Therefore, we call poetry the catch of Óðinn or his meeting or drink or gift and the drink of the Æsir.] (My translation)

It is interesting to note here that the prose *Edda* actually suggests a kenning *Óðins fundr*, which could have been expected in stanza 2. It could be argued that, according to the rules for kennings offered by the prose *Edda*, the name of Óðinn could be exchanged with any name of the Æsir, e.g., Frigg, and this is most likely the foundation for Finnur Jónsson's emendation.

Whatever solution we choose for these specific problems of reading and interpreting the poem, it should be obvious from the single example of stanza 2 that we are very often on shaky ground when using the edited text of, e.g., *Íslenzk fornrit* as a base for our understanding. In the following, with this in mind, the edited text will still be supplied parallel to the text from the C redaction of *Egils saga* for the sake of availability; it is, however, important to remember the premises for my

reading, that this edited text in itself is a new version of the poem that has very little evidence in the medieval material.

If we now take a first look at the poem as a whole as it is, in fact, found only in Ketilsbækur, the first thing that should be mentioned is the textuality of the presentation. The poem consists of 24 stanzas that are clearly forming a concluded text. This indicates a literate approach to the composition rather than an oral one, with stanzas providing an introduction to the theme, and stanzas making a clear close of the poem that echo the introductory stanzas.

The first two stanzas present the situation of grief. The poet mentions as early as the first line how difficult it is for him to express himself. The poetic lament is hard to bring forward for the one who has lost his kin. These two stanzas, together with the last three stanzas (23–25), form the outer frame of the poem. Together they provide what appears to be a coordinated introduction and conclusion of the text *Sonatorrek*. The first two stanzas and the last two are presented here to illustrate how even the wording is similar in the first and the last stanza.

1. *Egils saga C* (142–3) Edition in *ÍF 2* (246)

Mjaug er um tregt Mjǫk	erum tregt
tüngu ad hræra	tungu at hrœra
edr lopt væi	með loptvætt
ljöd pundara	ljóðpundara;
era nü vænlegt	esa nú vænligt
um Vidris þïfe	of Viðurs þýfi,
nje högdrægt	né hógdrœgt
ür hugur fílskne	ór hugar fylgsni.

[It is very hard for me to move my tongue in composing a poem; it is not a good time for poetry nor is it easy to force it out of the mind's storage.]

(My translation)

In the very first line, the poet focuses on his own problem of composing the lament in poetry. There is no indication as to why he has this difficulty of finding poetic expression. It is only from the preceding prose that we know that Egill Skalla-Grímsson has lost not only his favorite son Bǫðvarr, but also another son called Gunnarr. There is just a small emendation made by Finnur Jónsson in this stanza. In line 3, the reading is *lopt væi* rather than *loptvætt* as in the *ÍF* edition. In *LP*, Finnur Jónsson explains the emendation as just another form of the same *hapax legomenon*. The line of thought is continued in the second stanza.

2. *Egils saga C* (143) Edition in *ÍF 2* (246–7)

Era andþeist	Esa auðþeystr,
þvïat ecke velldur	þvít ekki veldr
haufuglegr	hǫfugligr,
ür higgju stad	ór hyggju stað
fagna fundr	fagna fundr
þriggja	nidja Friggjar niðja
ärborinn	ár borinn
Ür Jǫtun heimum	e ór Jǫtunheimum.

[It is not easily forced from the place of thought – sorrow is the cause – the poetry, borne long ago from the land of giants.] (My translation)

Here sorrow is mentioned for the first time, but not the cause of this sorrow. The focus here is instead on the poetic expression and the difficulty of composing. As demonstrated above, the understanding of this stanza is based on the emended text found in modern editions, but even when the manuscript text is revisited, the general understanding of the stanza is not significantly altered if we leave out the emendation of the kenning introducing the goddess Frigg.

The two last stanzas of the poem seem to form a sequel to the first two stanzas. Here the poet returns to the importance of poetic expression and its role in his life.

23. *Egils saga C* (148) Edition in *ÍF 2* (256)

Gäfunzt ïþrot	Gǫfumk íþrótt
ülfs og bage	ulfs of bági
vïge vanur	vígi vanr
vamme firda	vammi firða
og þad gjed	ok þat geð,
er eg gjørda mjer	es gerðak mér
vïsa fjandr	vísa fjandr
ad velaundum	af vélǫndum.

[Óðinn, experienced in battle, gave me the art that strikes at slander and the temper that provided open enemies for false friends.] (My translation)

In this penultimate stanza, poetry is presented as a gift to the poet from Óðinn ["bági úlfs" (the enemy of the wolf)]. The poet states that he received the gift and that it has helped him in making open enemies of false friends. No word here about the lament of dead kin. The last stanza has its focus on the poet and his own death.

24. *Egils saga C* (148)	Edition in *ÍF 2* (256)
Nü er mjer torvellt	Nú erum torvelt,
Tveggja baga[7]	Tveggja bága
njørfa nipt	njǫrva nipt
ä nesin stendr	á nesi stendr,
skal eg þö gladur	skalk þó glaðr
med gödan vilja	góðum vilja
og öhriggr	ok óhryggr
heljar bïda	heljar bíða.

[It is hard for me as Hel stands on the narrow peninsula; but gladly and with a positive mind I will wait for my death.] (My translation)

If the four stanzas are seen from a structural perspective, it is clear that they are composed to match each other. The introductory stanza states that "Mjǫk erum tregt" to compose poetry while the last stanza states that "Nú erum torvelt" to live on, but still the poet will stand content and glad in wait of his own death. The second stanza (in whichever reading we choose, revised or not) further stresses the difficulties of the poet in gaining his inspiration. This is mirrored in the second to last stanza (23) where the gift of poetry is celebrated as a way to stand firm: the poet has regained his ability to compose. This frame embeds the rest of the poem that is more focused on the deaths in the family and their implications for the poet. It is soon clear, however, that, rather than contemplating the death of kin, the poem is focused on the poet's own loss of support and people to defend his honor.

It is only in the third stanza that the death of a son is explicitly mentioned. There is not much said of him, however; he seems rather to be an object lost to the father than a loved person. Finnur Jónsson has made no significant changes in this stanza.

3. *Egils saga C* (143)	Edition in *ÍF 2* (247)
Lastalauss	lastalauss
er lifnade	es lifnaði
ä nǫckvers	á nǫkkvers
nøckva brage	nǫkkva bragi;
Jøtuns häls	Jǫtuns hals

7 The edition has a comment: "baga] sål. (ved konjektur) K2; boga (!) K1 825" (2006, 148–9).

under flota	undir þjóta
näins nidur	náins niðr
firer naust dirum	fyr naustdyrum.

[When without guilt the son lay on the cold peninsula, the wind of the sea howls around my dead son's grave on the beach.] (My translation)

From the following stanza 4, the poem turns back to the poet and his loss. First, the end of kinship is lamented. The man who has to bury his own son (or rather: kin) is the important person here, not the dead kin. The focus turns to the poet and his sorrow, rather than to the loss of a beloved son. And in subsequent stanzas, the focus is even more on the poet and his loss of support. The son would have become a good man as he was the son of the poet.

11. *Egils saga C* (145) Edition in *ÍF 2* (250)

Veit eg þad själfr	Veitk þat sjalfr,
at ï sine mïnum	at í syni mínum
var‹a› ïlls þegns	vasa ills þegns
efne vaxid	efni vaxit,
ef sä randvidr	ef randviðr
rauskvazt næde	røskvask næði,
uns hergautz	uns hergauts
hendr of tæke	hendr of tœki.

[I know myself that nothing bad would have come from my son if he had grown to maturity before Óðinn retrieved him.] (My translation)

And consequently, the son was primarily important as he supported his father without question. This is further treated in stanza 12.

12. *Egils saga C* (145) Edition in *ÍF 2* (250)

Æ ljet flest	Æ lét flest
þad er fader mællte	þat's faðir mælti,
þött øll þjöd	þótt ǫll þjóð
annad segde	annat segði,
og mjer upphjellt	mér upp helt
um verberge	of herbergi
og mitt afl	ok mitt afl
mest um studde	mest of studdi.

[He always heeded his father's word even when others disagreed; he helped me at home and supported my strength.] (My translation)

In stanza 19, what seems to be a second son is mentioned. It could be the case, however, that the poet is still contemplating the same son and that stanza 19 is only a variation of the theme found in stanzas 11 and 12. The change from *vammavanr* in the C version to *vamma vanr* in the *ÍF* edition only slightly changes the meaning of the stanza.

19. *Egils saga C* (147) Edition in *ÍF 2* (254)

Sïzt son minn	síz son minn
söttar brïme	sóttar brími
heiptuglegr	heiptugligr
ür heime nam	ór heimi nam,
þann eg veit	þanns ek veit
ad varnade	at varnaði
vammavar	vamma vanr
vid nämæle	við námæli.

[Since my son left this world, taken by the hard disease, I know that he avoided evil and stood against slander.] (My translation)

The variation of the theme of the good son is continued in stanza 20, where Óðinn is presented as the god who took the son away from the parents.

20. *Egils saga C* (147) Edition in *ÍF 2* (254–255)

Þad man eg enn	Þat mank enn,
er upp um höf	es upp of hóf
ï god heim	í Goðheim
Gauta spjalle	Gauta spjalli
ættarask	ættar ask,
þann er	öx af mjer þanns óx af mér,
ok kin vid	ok kynvið
kvonar minnar	kvánar minnar.

[I do remember when Óðinn took him to the world of gods, the limb of kin grown from me, the branch of my wife's family.] (My translation)

It is interesting to note here that, following Finnur Jónsson's reading, Óðinn ["Gauta spjalli" (the confidante of the Gotar)][8] would lead to the interpretation that Óðinn has received the son who died from a disease, which again would not be in line with the mythology underlying skaldic imagery; the one who dies from disease would rather be received by Hel. The next thing to consider, therefore, is the poet's positioning in relation to the gods. There is really just one god mentioned in the poem, Óðinn, who was, according to the prose *Edda*, the leading god and also the god of the skalds. It would therefore not be surprising to find him in this context. But there are also references in the poem to two supernatural beings related to the sea, Rǫ́n and Ægir.

In stanza 7, Rǫ́n is said to have taken away all of the beloved ones from the poet. It is again interesting to note that the relationship is between the sea-goddess and the poet. Much has been taken away from me ("rysktan mik") and I am bereft ("emk ofsnauðr") of all whom I loved. And all is because of Rǫ́n, who (as a personification of the sea) has riven the rope of my kin ("minnar ættar"), a hard knot of myself ("snaran þǫtt af sjǫlfum mér").

7.	*Egils saga C* (144)	Edition in *ÍF 2* (248)
	Mjauk hefur Rän	Mjǫk hefr Rǫ́n
	riskt um mig	of rysktan mik;
	em eg ofsnaudr	emk ofsnauðr
	at ästvinum	at ástvinum;
	sleit mars bǫnd	sleit marr bǫnd
	minnar ættar	minnar ættar,
	‹snaran› þätt	snaran þǿtt
	af själfum mjer	af sjǫlfum mér.

[Rǫ́n has taken much from me, I have lost all I ever loved. The sea broke all ties of kin, a hard rope of myself.] (My translation)

Even Óðinn is accused of betrayal by the poet. He states that he had a good relationship with Óðinn until the god betrayed their friendship. The focus yet again is on the poet and his relation to the god; no mention here of the dead sons.

8 It should be noted that Finnur Jónsson's reading "Gautar" (m.pl.) (gotar) here is only one of two possible readings. A second reading, "Gauti" (m.sg.) (Óðinn), is also possible but would be problematic if the kenning is interpreted as "Óðinn"; this reading would lead instead to an interpretation of "Gauta spjalli" as "the confidante of Óðinn" = "warrior."

21. *Egils saga C* (147–148) Edition in *ÍF 2* (255)

Ätta eg gott	Áttak gótt
vid geira drottinn	við geirs dróttin,
gjørdunst triggr	gerðumk tryggr
ad trüa hanum	at trúa hǫnum,
ädr umat	áðr vinan
vagna runne	vagna rúni
sigur haufundr	sigrhǫfundr
um sleit vid mig	of sleit við mik.

[I was living well with the god of the spear [Óðinn], it felt secure to trust in him, before the friendship was broken by the victorious god.] (My translation)

In the penultimate stanza (23), which in many ways form a part of the frame mentioned earlier, the poet still praises Óðinn for the gifts he has received from him. The god has provided him with the art of poetry (or of the word), which betrays false friends and makes them open enemies. So, once again, the poet is the focus.

If we return, finally, to the last stanza (24), we see the poet once again complaining about his own difficulties, but now he has regained his courage and is willing to fight on in good will (*góðum vilja*). This last expression has been mentioned as a Christian phrase, found in texts from the thirteenth century and later (see, e.g., Torfi H. Tulinius 2004). This could at least indicate that the frame could be a later addition to make the poem a closed text with Christian references, but it could also indicate a considerably later date than the tenth century for the whole poem.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is time to further investigate the contexts suggested by the above discussion in order to gain insight into how the representations of self could be situated. There is little support for placing the poem in the tenth century when it was allegedly composed. Egill Skalla-Grímsson may very well have been a historical person and poet, but the saga composed more than two centuries later provides a fictional portrait of him. If poetry contemporary to the Viking Age Egill is examined (which is, however, found in similar contexts and with similar source critical problems), the corpus does not provide any parallels to *Sonatorrek*. When the poets allegedly composing stanzas or longer poems in the tenth century mention themselves, it is generally in relation to a king or powerful chieftain. More intimate references are rare or more or less unseen in the extant material. This indicates

that Egill would be a strange exception in this period if he composed a poem of this kind. As Russell Poole (2010) has argued, we would need to go outside of the Norse material to find contemporary parallels, for example, in the Anglo-Saxon poetry of the time.

The strongest argument for *Sonatorrek* being a pre-Christian poem would be that it refers to a world of "heathen" gods and uses kennings based on what seems to be a Viking Age poetic tradition. This argument is weakened by the appearance of similar kennings and use of mythology in thirteenth- and even fourteenth-century poetry in *dróttkvætt*. It could also be argued that the presentation of Norse poetics and mythology found in the prose *Edda* attributed to Snorri Sturluson indicates that it would not necessarily be a "pagan" poet who composed a poem like *Sonatorrek*; the poet could just as well have been a contemporary of Snorri and of the author of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, as argued by, for example, Torfi H. Tulinius (2001, 2004).

It would be tempting, therefore, to suggest that the poet Egill and his poetry are the result of a thirteenth-century narrator's creation of a tenth-century narrated self, a poet with "pagan" attributes, but still reminding the narrator and his intended audience of their own time and milieu. This would lead us back to the saga narrative and allow us to understand the poem as part of the fiction created by a thirteenth-century narrator rather than as a tenth-century expression of an itinerant and violent warrior poet, as suggested by Poole (2010).

As I have demonstrated above, however, the medieval tradition as it is present in the fourteenth-century manuscript Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol) indicates that only the initial stanza was preserved in relation to the saga narrative. This could lead us to conclude, on the one hand, that the medieval scribes and the saga author who mention only the single stanza in the text leading up to the first stanza did not know the rest of the poem or, on the other hand, that the poem was considered to be so well known that it did not need to be written down; everyone who read or heard the saga would know it by heart when the first stanza was presented. The latter explanation cannot be sustained in any extant contemporary discussions of poetry and the performance of poems. Rather, it seems likely that the author has chosen to provide only a single stanza, either because he had no interest in the poetic tradition or because he actually did not know the full poem. It is also interesting that the C version of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* that does contain the whole poem extant today still introduces the poem with only mentioning the introductory stanza, as if the exemplar (or its exemplar) did in fact contain no more than this single stanza.

For the sake of argument, therefore, it is relevant to address the question of whether *Sonatorrek* as it exists today, extant only in a seventeenth-century context, should be analyzed primarily in relation to the expression of self in this late period;

all other contexts would be formed based on speculation rather than extant material. However, it must be made clear that, to my knowledge, there is no evidence or even any indication (except in the state of preservation) of the largest part of the poem being a seventeenth-century amendment in order to provide a full poem. Linguistically, the poem seems to be too well formed as a medieval (or even Viking Age) composition to be the work of a seventeenth-century antiquarian. If it were, it would have to be assumed that this seventeenth-century antiquarian was well read in Norse metrics and poetics. It would also imply that, rather than expressing his own self, the poet would have aimed at representing what he considered the expression of sorrow and loss of a Viking Age poet. It should be stated, therefore, that the poem as it is preserved most likely represents a late, perhaps late medieval, understanding of the Viking Age poet and his expression of self. It might also be the case that the seventeenth-century antiquarian introduced the full poem from another source in order to present the poet's self-expression to a new audience in a new time and perhaps also in a new intellectual context. My conclusion must be that the representation would not be that of a seventeenth-century poet, but it would still provide interesting insights into the antiquarian interests of this period.

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Stefka G. Eriksen

Medieval Page-turners: Interpreting Revenge in *Njáls saga* in Reykjabók (AM 468 4to) and Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol.)

Abstract: The aim of this article is to investigate the initial programs in two manuscripts of *Njáls saga*, namely Reykjabók and Möðruvallabók, in order to evaluate whether the interpretation of the text may be conditioned by the *mise en page* of the manuscripts. The article focuses on the series of revenges prior to and following the killing of Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði and discusses whether the initial program helps explain these episodes by means of Christian ideology, or by means of the norms in an honor-based society, or by means of basic human psychology. The study shows how different meaning construction processes may be triggered to various degrees by the graphic structuring of medieval manuscripts. Stories of revenge and honor may thus be seen as medieval page-turners inviting and challenging the writing and reading selves to be creative in their writing and interpreting strategies.

Keywords: multimodal communication, interpreting / constructing meaning, material philology, *mise en page*, initials, revenge, writing and reading selves

With the advance of material philology, more and more scholars are studying not only the specific codicological peculiarities of medieval manuscripts, but also what these material peculiarities can tell us about narrative and cognitive structures inherent in the texts. Further, studying textual transmission from a new philological perspective can tell us how these narrative and cognitive structures changed over time and conditioned the possible meanings of a text in various socio-cultural contexts. This article will investigate whether the *mise en page* of various manuscripts of the most complex of the Sagas of Icelanders, *Njáls saga*, may be interpreted to show different inherent narrative and cognitive patterns, and thus meanings of the saga. This will be done by focusing on one specific episode, namely, the killing of Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði, including the series of events preceding and following it. This series of events is, at its core, a feud between two kin groups, triggered by continuous assaults and acts of revenge, which are traditionally regarded as common and characteristic for

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an honor-based culture like Old Norse culture. Revenge is, however, also an extremely common human reaction, combining cold rationality and intense emotions. It exists in all kinds of societies and is described in numerous literary classics, such as the *Iliad*, *Hamlet*, *Medea*, *The Great Gatsby*, just to mention a few. By studying how the series of acts of revenge in *Njáls saga* are actually written down on the manuscript page, how they are structured in suitable episodes, marked visually by initials and rubrics, it will be discussed whether the scribes of the different manuscripts may have had different explanations of the acts of revenge and the saga as a whole – did they see them as culturally conditioned, as something deeply emotional, individual, and existential, or did they intend for the reader to figure this out by themselves?

The selves that this article will engage with most immediately are thus the selves of the scribes and readers of medieval manuscripts.[1] We will investigate the possible writing strategies that scribes had to project, or inject, a specific meaning onto a text they were copying and, on the other end of the communication process, the possibilities that medieval readers had to interpret a text in various ways. Was a certain intended meaning of a text engraved in and clearly communicated by the scribe, through the way a text was written, or did the scribe leave his reader with options for his or her own interpretations? Further, could this potential freedom of interpretation vary depending on the way different versions of the same story were written? And last but not least, did this freedom of interpretation vary depending on what text and genre one read? When addressing these questions, we are of course not negating all the pragmatic functions of the graphic aspects of a manuscript page, such as helping a reader find a specific section and navigating the book. Such pragmatic functions, I would argue, rather emphasize the significance of the various elements of the *mise en page* as conditioning factors for the understanding and interpretation of the text.[2]

1 Even though this article focuses on investigating the material evidence of saga manuscripts, it has to be remembered that the sagas must have been communicated orally as well, either based on the reading of an actual book or based on memory. Obviously, we can know nothing about oral transmission as such, except that it must have existed and that it was certainly a main mode of transmission of the sagas and other narratives (Lethbridge 2016). If, on the other hand, a manuscript was read out loud to a listening audience, it may be argued that some of the graphical aspects of a manuscript page, such as the division into chapters by initials and rubrics, could have been vocalized by the public reader, by explicitly reading the wording of the rubric, by changing the tone of voice, or by even taking a break in the reading session (Eriksen 2014). A distinction must, nonetheless, be made between a reader having visual access to the manuscript and one who is solely listening to the narrative being read aloud or retold.

2 For a similar discussion, see Eriksen (2019).

In the following, we will, first of all, discuss why it is methodologically legitimate to look for meaning in the way a text about a series of acts of revenge is structured on the manuscript page. Thereafter, we will turn to *Njáls saga*, the history of its manuscript transmission, and scholarship done on the meaning of the acts of revenge. The questions above will then be investigated by studying two versions of *Njáls saga*, namely, Reykjabók (AM 468 4to), *c*. 1300–1315 and Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol.), *c*. 1330–1370. We will focus on the layout and graphic structure of the chosen textual sections. In conclusion, we will discuss whether the differences in graphic structure may suggest a variety of available interpretation strategies for medieval reading selves.

Multimodal Communication

First of all: Why is it legitimate to look for a link between the content and the narrative structure of a text, the way it is structured visually, and the freedom of interpretation that emerges from this textuality and materiality? There are two arguments for this, and they come from two different perspectives: the first one is inspired by cognitive sciences and principles of multimodal communication and interpretation, while the second is based on recent studies of textuality and materiality of Old Norse manuscripts.

From the perspective of cognitive sciences, humans interpret culture and construct meaning by unconsciously blending various linguistic and narrative patterns, by compressing large narratives to concise metaphors, and by projecting and expanding these same metaphors to produce different meaning in various contexts. For example, a metaphor like "When the cat's away, the mice will play" may be understood in many different ways depending on the target context in which it is used: in the classroom, the cat would be the teacher; at work it would be the boss, etc. (Turner 1996, 6). Meaning is thus not stable and rigidly defined, but it is the result of a constant construction process which entails complex operations of projecting, linking, contrasting, and blending multiple spaces (Turner 1996, 57).

These complex operations happen in all types of communications, including multimodal communication, which characterizes most communication. Multimodal communication predates language and is a context for it. It extends in a huge variety of artistic and cultural expressions, including cave paintings, dance and music, theatre and tv (Steen and Turner 2013). When we listen to someone talking, we observe their body language, we listen to their voice intonation, and maybe feel their interaction with the physical and social

space. We blend all these impressions to construct a meaning of what is being communicated. The process of constructing meaning when reading is similar. Imagine a children's book, where small images are sometimes used instead of written-out words to help children learn to read. The child manages to understand this because the meaning of the words written on the page and the images on the page are automatically and subconsciously combined in the interpreting process. Understanding the front page of a newspaper is another example when the meanings of the various elements are automatically combined, as meaning is given not just to the written words, but also to the size of the script, the type of the script, the pictures, and the headlines, and not least their positioning in relation to each other. A couple of metaphors may be given as a final example of the connection between the content of a text, its structure, and the layout. A "page-turner," for example, refers to a text or a book that is so exciting that you want to continue turning the pages and reading, while a "cliff-hanger" is a plot device where the main character is described in a dilemma that requires an important choice to be made, at the end of chapter (or episode for series). This once again requires the continuation of the reading, from one chapter to the next, and the turning of the pages.

The same basic mental operations occur in the interpretation of a manuscript page as well: not only is the materiality and visuality of the manuscript page conceived of as a unit when a reader constructs meaning out of the text, but the material, visual, and textual elements are blended to produce a new meaning of the manuscript as a whole, which is not possible to reach based solely on text or on visuality. It is therefore essential to regard a medieval manuscript as a multimodal cultural expression – it was meant to be looked at, to be read, maybe even vocalized in a certain context – and its potential meanings lay in its multimodality. This difference between texts and books produced in press culture, as opposed to texts written in manuscript culture, is that in the latter context every scribe had the opportunity to change the relationship between content, structure, and layout, thus toning down or highlighting any "page-turner" or "cliff-hanger" qualities of a chapter or text. This article will thus investigate not only the multimodality inherent in *Njáls saga* manuscripts, but also whether and how the change in this multimodality may have changed the potential for interpretation.

The relationship between the textuality and materiality of medieval manuscripts has also been a main concern for the so-called material philologists since the 1990s. They do not refer to the cognitive principles behind meaning construction, but emphasize that all aspects of a medieval manuscript need to be taken in consideration when the texts within them are read and analyzed – these include the materiality of the manuscript, the nature of the socio-cultural

context where the manuscript was produced, and, of course, the language, style, and content of the text (Nichols 1990).

This has been influential within Old Norse literary studies and philology, too, and gradually more and more scholars demonstrate how the meaning of a text is inherent in its verbal and linguistic characteristics, as well as in the materiality and visuality of the manuscripts. In her PhD thesis, Katharina Heinz discusses how the visual structuring of the Old Norse *King's Mirror* in its main manuscript AM 243 b α fol., *c*. 1275, strengthens and emphasizes the intended function of the rhetorical figures used in the text, namely, to teach and instruct (Heinz 2019). One example may be seen in the rhetorical figure of the winds, which is used twice in the texts: at the beginning and the end of a long section about the wonders of nature and the world. Such usage of the winds is also common in visual representations of the world, namely, on medieval maps such as the map of Ebstorf, where the winds are depicted in a frame surrounding the representation of the world and its history. In the manuscript of *The King's Mirror*, the winds are not visually represented, but they are emphasized visually through initials which mark the textual sections where the winds are mentioned. The visual emphasis of a textual element (the winds) that is traditionally used to frame visual narratives about the natural world could have triggered the medieval reader to think of world maps, which would have colored his reading of *The King's Mirror*. Of course, we do not know if this happened, but the potential for such blending is certainly inherent in the way the scribe wrote and structured his text.

A second example, of many possible ones,[3] may be given from an analysis of the textual and material structure of the Old Norse *Barlaams saga* (Eriksen 2019). The text is a collection of parables and exempla, some based on the Bible, while others have no biblical parallels. However, all of these parables may be seen as an intended lesson or exercise in the *quadriga* model of interpreting, which entails that an event (originally a biblical event, but the interpretation model was certainly usable for other texts and genres too) could be read on four levels: a historical, an allegorical, a moral, and an eschatological level. A recent study of the main Norwegian manuscript of the saga, Holm Perg 6 fol., *c*. 1250, shows that this *quadriga* model of interpretation is inherent in the way the parables are written down

3 For a study of old Norse law manuscripts, see Rohrbach (2014). For studies of the relationship between images and text in medieval Nordic manuscripts, see Drechsler (2016); Liepe (2009). For a study of the correspondence of materiality and textuality in various versions of the story about Elye / Elíss and its implications for the mode in which the story may have been communicated, see Eriksen (2014).

in the manuscripts, as visual emphasis is more or less systematically given to the separate levels of interpretation. It may thus be argued that the scribe of the text may have intended to emphasize the *quadriga* model of interpretation through both the content and the graphic structuring of his text. The close correspondence between textuality and materiality would have made the intended message relatively clear for a reader and does not allow for enormous freedom of interpretation.

Major postulates and tendencies in these two very different research fields thus point in the same direction: it is indeed legitimate to look for meaning in the way a text is written down in a medieval manuscript, as will be done in this article based on two versions of *Njáls saga*. A main aim of the article will be to discuss the degree to which the theoretical potential of meaning in multimodal communication is used actively by the scribes of these two manuscripts.

Njáls saga

Njáls saga is, as mentioned, the most complex of the Sagas of Icelanders. Like the other Sagas of Icelanders, it is anonymous and is conventionally dated to *c*. 1280. It is preserved in about 60 manuscripts, 21 of these from the period 1300–1600, and only six medieval manuscripts contain the bulk of the saga (Arthur and Zeevaert 2018; Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission 1989, 340):

- Reykjabók (AM 468 4to), *c*. 1300–1315
- Gráskinna (GKS 2870 4to), *c*. 1300 and with additions from *c*. 1500–1550
- Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol.), *c*. 1330–1370
- Kálfalækjarbók (AM 133 fol.), *c*. 1350
- Skafinskinna (GKS 2868 4to), *c*. 1350–1400
- Oddabók (AM 466 4to), *c*. 1460

The narrative in the saga starts a few years before the year 1000, and it revolves around the close friendship between Njáll from Bergþórshváll and Gunnarr from Hlíðarendi, and the relationship between members of their families, which is less friendly. The saga is about friendship, love, pride, jealousy and hatred, identity and belonging to the farmstead and the country, ideological and political changes – all of this shown and enacted through a series of feuds, offences, and acts of revenge between the two main family constellations of Njáll and Gunnarr.

The plot of the saga is extremely complicated, and I refer the interested reader to a very useful – and concise – summary by William Ian Miller (2014, 8–13). The series of events that we will focus on here, namely, the episodes that lead to and follow the killing of Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði by Njáll's sons, may be seen as the

culmination of the narrative. To recapitulate: in chapter 92 of *Njáls saga*,[4] Njáll's son Skarpheðinn kills Þráinn Sigfússon, uncle of Gunnarr (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954). A settlement is achieved (ch. 93) and Njáll fosters Þráinn's son Hǫskuldr (ch. 94). A few years later, Njáll makes Hǫskuldr a chieftain of Hvítanes, after reorganizing the whole juridical organization of the country for this to be possible, and marries him off prestigiously to a wife who had refused to marry a man who was not a chieftain (ch. 97). Thereafter, Þráinn's brother-in-law, Lýtingr, kills Njáll's illegitimate son, also called Hǫskuldr (ch. 98). Hóskuldr Hvítanessgoði and Njáll, who are foster-son and foster-father, and belong to the families in conflict, agree on a settlement (ch. 99). The next five chapters in the edition are dedicated to the Christianization of Iceland (ch. 100–5). The settlement does not lead to a cessation of the feud between the two kin groups, and Njáll's sons revenge the killing of their half-brother Hǫskuldr by killing their foster-brother Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði (ch. 111):

> Veðr var gott og sól upp komin.
>
> 111. Í þenna tíma vaknaði Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði. Hann fór í klæði sín og tók yfir sig skikkjuna Flosanaut. Hann tók kornkippu og sverð í aðra hönd og fer til gerðisins og sáir niður korninu.
>
> Þeir Skarphéðinn höfðu það mælt með sér að þeir skyldu allir á honum vinna. Skarphéðinn spratt upp undan garðinum. En er Höskuldur sá hann vildi hann undan snúa.
>
> Þá hljóp Skarphéðinn að honum og mælti: "Hirð eigi þú að hopa á hæl, Hvítanesgoði" og höggur til hans og kom í höfuðið og féll hann á knéin.
>
> Höskuldur mælti þetta: "Guð hjálpi mér en fyrirgefi yður."
>
> Hljópu þeir þá að honum allir og unnu á honum. (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 280–281)

> The weather was good, and the sun was risen.
>
> 111. About that time Hoskuld the Godi of Hvitanes awoke; he put on his clothes and covered himself with his cloak, Flosi's gift. He took his seed-basket in one hand and his sword in the other and went to his field and started sowing.
>
> Skarphedin and the others had agreed that they would all give him a wound. Skarphedin sprang up from behind the wall. When Hoskuld saw him, he wanted to turn away, but Skarphedin ran up to him and spoke: "Don't bother taking to your heels, Hvitanes-Godi" – and he struck with his sword and hit him in the head, and Hoskuld fell on his knees.
>
> He spoke this: "May God help me and forgive you."
>
> They all ran at him and wounded him to death. (Cook 1997)

Flosi, Hǫskuldr's kinsman, is afterwards urged by the latter's widow to exact revenge. Flosi and Njáll are about to reach a settlement at the *Alþing*, but the

4 When referring to chapter numbers, I refer to the Íslensk Fornrit edition by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1954).

opportunity is wasted through sarcastic and hateful comments between Flosi and the Njáll's sons, and a settlement is not achieved (ch. 123–4). As expected by tradition in an honor-based society, Flosi has to avenge the killing of his relative Hǫskuldr, which leads to the dramatic burning of Njáll and his family in their house by Flosi and his men (ch. 128–30). The rest of the saga retells how Kári, Njáls son-in-law, who manages to escape the burning house, avenges his family, by killing 15 men. In the end, Kári and Flosi reconcile after doing their respective pilgrimages, and Flosi gives Hǫskuldr's widow as a wife to Kári (ch. 159).

History of Research

This dramatic and very violent series of events has caught the attention of many scholars, who have discussed why the conflict escalates to such a degree and what social norms may explain such extreme behavior as, for example, the killing of Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði by his own foster-brothers, Njáll's sons. Three major possible explanations of this very killing have been proposed in scholarship. The first explanation of this episode, and the saga as a whole, is proposed by scholars like Lars Lönnroth and Andrew Joseph Hamer (Lönnroth 1976; Hamer 2014). Even though they argue in different ways, their main thesis is that the content and structure of *Njáls saga* was deeply influenced by the clerical mind and the Christian mentality of the author of the saga. With regard to the killing of Hǫskuldr, for example, Lönnroth points out that the way his foster-father, Njáll, mourns over him "þotti mér sløkkt it sætasta ljós augna minna" (it seemed to me that the sweetest light of my eyes had been turned out) alludes to the Vulgate, references to God himself, and to models from medieval hagiography on how a parent mourns the loss of a saintly child (Lönnroth 1976, 114). Hǫskuldr's killing may thus be seen as an allusion to a loss of a saint or a martyr. The whole episode happens right after the acceptance of the Christian faith and may be seen as a moral challenge presented by the Christian author, to test the faith of the newly converted Christians.

The second paradigm for making sense of the saga, including the killing of Hǫskuldr, has been proposed by scholars such as William Ian Miller and Daniel Sävborg (Sävborg 2011; Miller 2014), who emphasize the significance of the strong social demands and expectations for revenge in the pre-Christian Norse society, which were still socially valid for many years after the actual Christianization. Miller argues that the only reason why Hǫskuldr is killed is that he is made chieftain and as a chieftain he is at the top of the hierarchy which affords him both privileges and responsibilities. He is responsible for the safety and security of his

kinsmen, but he is also responsible for the wrongdoings of his kinsmen. Even though Hǫskuldr and Njáll reach an agreement between themselves, Njáll's sons are not satisfied with that agreement, which has been made without their knowledge or approval. They thus take responsibility into their own hands and kill the head of the kin-group responsible for the offence, namely Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði, even though he is their own foster-brother.

The last explanation of this killing has a different starting point. Yes, the killing happens in a specific cultural context, and both Christian and pre-Christian norms may have played a role when such a dramatic offence was committed. However, the killing of a foster-brother is also quite inseparable from the personal relationship between the offender and the victim. Revenge within the closest family is not unique to the Sagas of Icelanders. Much world literature circles around this motif, which suggests that the psychology of revenge and forgiveness is a primal vehicle for human existence and relationship navigation, regardless of cultural, social, and religious context (McCullough 2013; Beatties 2005; Schumann and Ross 2010). It is therefore relevant to ask whether the relationship between the people involved in the incident may have been a main motivation rather than exclusively the social expectations and norms. Elsewhere, I have argued that the dynamics of the relationship between Skarpheðinn, Hǫskuldr, and Njáll is indeed described in such a way that it may have provoked Skarpheðinn to kill his foster-brother (Eriksen 2018). They all get along wonderfully in the beginning, when Hǫskuldr is fostered. Njáll is, however, so fond of his foster-son and prioritizes him to such a degree, time after time, instead of his own first-born, Skarpheðinn, that the latter is gradually filled with much pain and jealousy. His lack of success when attempting to win the approval, love, and respect of his father is so aggravating, that he uses the first available opportunity to take the life of his much-beloved foster-brother.[5]

These three possible explanations – that Hǫskuldr is killed to serve as Christian martyr-model; because he was a pre-Christian chieftain with responsibilities; or because he was the preferred son – may seem exclusive, but they are not. In fact, a combination of all these explanations may appear as an explanation on its own. A characteristic common to all the approaches of the scholars mentioned above is that none of them consider the significance of the manuscripts' layouts when interpreting the text, as will be done here.

On the other hand, scholars who have studied the graphic structure and layout of the manuscripts of *Njáls saga* have not necessarily discussed the meaning of

5 A similar argument, but not based on cognitive and psychological models, is proposed by Tirosh (2014).

the acts of revenge, but rather the general meaning of the saga.[6] As early as 1975, Lars Lönnroth commented on the structural division in the Njála manuscripts. He argues that variations in the placement of the initials are mostly due to errors (when a scribe has started making space for the initial too early or too late and the new chapter needs to start a sentence earlier or later compared to the exemplar being copied), with the exception of a few cases when the scribes made completely new, intended divisions (Lönnroth 1975, 51). However, he uses these observations to reconstruct the *original[7] version of the saga. Lönnroth further comments on the variation in the rubrics and the reason for their variations, but once again he is concerned with the *original version and the *author's text. With regard to some of the initials, he concludes in the traditional, for his time, positivistic style: "all these divisions should clearly be omitted from any new, critical edition of the saga" (Lönnroth 1975, 55). The aim of his study was to determine and distinguish the authentic and genuine as opposed to the spurious, erratic, and misunderstood. Once this was done, he discussed the functions of the initials, suggesting that some are "retarding" divisions (when one event is compounded by two sub-events); some indicate scene shifts, augmented by the use of narrative formulas; and others emphasize a general structural scheme of action-counteraction-settlement.

In another analysis of *Njáls saga*, Lönnroth discusses the meaning of the illuminations in the only illuminated manuscript of *Njáls saga*, namely, AM 133, Kálfalækjarbók, from around 1300 (Lönnroth 1976). The manuscripts contains three illuminated initials: on 14r a G (for Gunnarr) is illuminated with a dragon combating a lion; on 14v, an N (for Njáll) is illuminated with a man with a sword fighting a dragon; and lastly an H, marking the chapter recounting the conversion, is illuminated with a knightly figure with a shield and a sword riding on a horse. Lönnroth (1976) has interpreted these initials as indicating a textual division into a Gunnarr's saga and Njáll's saga. Lena Liepe (2008) has discussed these images from an art-historical point of view and connects them to the introduction of knightly culture to the North. Recently, Katahrina Heinz (2018) has combined the philological and art-historical concerns and has argued that the initials may be seen as rhetorical *figurae* that refer to the roles of the

6 See Lethbridge and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (2018) which includes articles on topics ranging from old and new stemmas of *Njáls saga*, to post medieval manuscripts, to studies of paratexts and linguistic features.

7 The * is commonly used in philological studies to indicate that this version does not exist anymore: it is a version that is reconstructed by an editor.

two figures Gunnarr and Njáll.[8] Gunnarr is characterized by the chivalric ideals that may be symbolized in the lion-dragon combat; Njáll is characterized by the depiction of a "lawman" fighting for justice, while the conversion is symbolically represented as a Christian soldier fighting for the true faith. Heinz argues that the work of the illuminator and the scribe are embedded in the chivalric culture and courtly conventions of the time, based on the use of similar literary images of the lion, dragon, and the knight in other contemporary texts, such as *Þiðreks saga* and *Laxdæla saga*.

In recent years, many scholars have approached the saga and its manuscripts from a more material, or new philological, perspective. The main focus of the recently completed research project "The Variance of *Njáls saga*," led by Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir at the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík, Iceland, was on the various types of textual variations of the saga, including linguistic, stylistic, and narrative. Emily Lethbridge shows in detail how distinctive textual variation manifested itself even in the earliest phase of the saga's written tradition (Lethbridge 2014). She points out that *Njáls saga* is unusual and distinguishes itself from the rest of the saga material, as it was copied out and circulated independently as the sole text in whole books. This suggests that *Njáls saga* was probably read in a different way compared to other sagas. The reasons for this may have been logistics, length, or the saga's "particular intrinsic worth and a different symbolic significance," as well as the saga's great geographical sweep, making it a national story (Lethbridge 2014, 77). Lethbridge concludes that the textual variation testifies to differing interpretations of infinite aspects of the narrative.

While this research project studies the textual variance of the saga, Susanne Arthur has studied the material aspects of *Njáls saga* manuscripts, including codicological and paratextual features (Arthur 2015). She has analyzed the codicology, readership, and reception of the approximately 60 manuscripts of the saga. By tracing size, layout, and text density, she discovers trends in the manuscript production and intended purposes, ranging from scholarly and prestigious, to private and less formal.

As relevant as such new philological research is for increasing our insight into the significance of the various manuscripts of *Njáls saga*, their production, and readership, this research does not discuss how the meaning of the saga is reflected through the graphic program in the various versions of the saga, as will be discussed in this article. Pursuing this question – to look for meaning based

8 See website for The 17th International Saga Conference, for program and abstracts: https://sagaconference2018.hi.is/ (accessed April 17, 2020).

on the graphical and textual aspects of versions of *Njáls saga* – is legitimate, as was argued above, based on principles in multimodal communication and new philological arguments. As said, only one *Njáls saga* manuscript has illuminations, but all of them have initials. This approach therefore allows the study of not only textual meaning based on initials and structure, but also variation in possible meanings of various versions of the text. Of the six medieval manuscripts that contain the bulk of the saga, our attention is focused on Reykjabók (AM 468 4to), *c*. 1300–1315 and Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol.), *c*. 1330–1370.

Reykjabók (AM 468 4to) and Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol.)

The two chosen manuscripts of *Njáls saga* have different content and format. Reykjabók is a small 4to (22.5 x 15.7 cm), where *Njáls saga* (fol. 1–93r) is the one main text. However, at the end of the saga, there are *vísur* concerning *Njáls saga* (fol. 93v) and *Hymn to the Virgin* (94r-v). The latter text is younger and makes explicit the significance of the Christian religion in the context of the reading of the manuscript, after its addition, but the same may not be claimed with regard to the context of the writing of *Njáls saga* itself. The text is structured in one column, red initials and red rubrics. A special aspect of the manuscript is that it includes 48 stanzas of skaldic verses, 27 of these being unique to this manuscript, written in the margins and at the end of the saga not by the one main scribe, but by a different but contemporary hand. This second scribe was responsible for adding 17 stanzas of skaldic poetry in the margins and at the end of the codex, and he occasionally added a forgotten word and highlighted others; he potentially drew the initials.[9] The earliest known home of the manuscript is Reykir in Miðfjörður, which gives the name of the manuscript. It was owned by Ingjaldur Illugason (1560–1643), who was the *lögréttumaður* in the district.[10]

Möðruvallabók (1330–1370) is a very different manuscript. It is a grand collection of 11 Sagas of Icelanders: *Njáls saga*, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, *Finnboga*

9 For a detailed discussion of the paleography of the material features of the manuscript, aiming to shed new light on the collaborative nature of the production of the manuscript, especially keeping in mind the presence of the unique skaldic verses, see Stegmann (2018).

10 For more information on the manuscript, its history, digital images of its folios, and references to secondary literature, see handrit.is (https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/en/AM04-0468 [accessed May 10, 2019]).

saga ramma, *Bandamanna saga*, *Kormáks saga*, *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Ölkofra saga*, *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, *Laxdæla saga*, and *Fóstbræðra saga*.[11] The manuscript consists of 200 folios, measures 33.5 x 24 cm, and is bound in wooden covers. Chesnutt (2010, 166) has argued that the manuscript was "a pile of loose, unbound groups of quires formerly kept in a workshop with a view to being sold in combinations determined by potential buyers." Despite its complex and varied content, the manuscript is uniform, written by a main scribe and a second hand (Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson 1994, 115–116; Chesnutt 2010).[12] The text is finely written and is structured in two columns, which seems to have been a fourteenth-century innovation (Chesnutt 2010). It is structured by red and green initials, some of them finely ornate, and red rubrics. Both scribes seem professional, and a plausible provenance for the manuscript is the Augustinian house at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur (Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson 1994, 118; Chesnutt 2010, 154). Chesnutt has argued that a manuscript like this reflects the ambitions of the fourteenth-century bourgeoisie to appropriate traditional history and make luxury items out of it.

When analyzing the chapter structure of the saga, I will focus on the section retold above, namely the part of the saga starting with the episode of the killing of Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði and ending with the burning of Njáll's family at Bergþórshváll, which span the chapters 110 to 130 in the ÍF edition. Table 1 shows the distribution of the initials in, respectively, the ÍF edition, Reykjabók, and Möðruvallabók. A quick survey of the wording of the passages where new chapters / initials appear reveals that these refer either to specific moments in time (e.g., chs. 110, 121); the introduction or activity of a specific character (almost all of them); or coincide with a movement of the narrative focus from one character / context to another (e.g., chs. 127, 128). The aspects of the initial programs that emerge as most striking and significant and that I will comment on in greater detail below are: (i) general similarities and differences between the two manuscripts, seen in juxtaposition to the Íslenzk fornrit edition (ÍF); (ii) the structuring of the killing of Hǫskuldr episode in both manuscripts; and (iii) the initial program in Möðruvallabók.

A last comment before we turn to these aspects of the initial programs concerns the size of the initials in the two manuscripts and the implications this has for the interpretation of the narrative structure of the saga. In Reykjabók,

11 For a short description of the codex, see Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2015). See also de Leeuw van Weenen (2018).

12 The same hands seem to have contributed to other manuscripts, containing religious and law texts. For more information, see https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/AM02-0132 (accessed January 02, 2019).

Table 1: Distribution of new chapters / initials in ÍF-edition, Reykjabók and Möðruvallabók.

ÍF	Reykjabók	Möðruvallabók
ch. 110, p. 279. Þat var einn dag	56r, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	39rb, 3 lines, green initial, red ornaments, red rubric
–	–	39rb, Þeir fóru þar til, er þeir kómu, 3 lines, red initial, red rubric (p. 280 in ÍF)
ch. 111, p. 280. Í þenna tíma vaknaði Hǫskuldr	56r, 'I' in the margin, red initial, red rubric	–
ch. 112, p. 282. Hildigunnr vaknaði	56v, 2 lines, no initial, red rubric	39va, 3 lines, red initial, dark ornamentation, red rubric
ch. 113, p. 283. Maðr er nefndr Guðmundr inn riki	57r, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	39vb, 3 lines, dark red initial, dark ornamentation, red rubric
ch. 114. p. 286. Snorri hét maðr, er kallaðr var goði	57r, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	40ra, 3 lines, green initial, red ornamentation, red rubric
ch. 115, p. 287. Flosi spyrr víg Hǫskulds	57r, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	40ra, 3 lines, green initial, red ornamentation, red rubric
ch. 116, p. 289. Hildigunnr var úti ok mælti	57v, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	40rb, 3 lines, red initial, red rubric
–	–	40vb, Ingjaldr bjó at Keldum; 'I' in the margin, green initial, red ornamentation, red rubric (p. 292 in ÍF)
ch. 117, p. 293. Sigfússynir spurðu at Flosi var við H	58v, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	40vb, 3 lines, red initial, dark ornaments, red rubric
ch. 118, p. 295. Njáll mælti til Skarpheðins	58v, 2 lines, no initial, red rubric	41ra, 3 lines, red initial, red ornamentation, red rubrics
ch. 119, p. 297. Flosi var þá kominn á þing	59r, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	41rb, 3 lines, dark red initial, red ornamentations, red rubrics
ch. 120, p. 303. Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson	60v, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	42rb, 3 lines, red initial, dark ornaments, red rubric
–	–	42vr, Guðmundr inn ríki hafði spurn af, 3 lines, red initial, green ornamentations, red rubric (p. 306 in ÍF)
ch. 121, p. 306. Annan dag eptir	61r, 2 lines, no initial, red rubric	42vr, 3 lines, red initial, green ornamentation, red rubric

Table 1 (continued)

ÍF	Reykjabók	Möðruvallabók
ch. 122, p. 309. Njáll stóð upp ok mælti	61v, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	42vr, 3 lines, green initial, red ornamentation, red rubric
ch. 123, p. 311. Snorri goði mælti svá	62r, 2 lines, missing initial, red rubric	43ra, 3 lines, dark red initial, red rubric
ch. 124, p. 315. Flosi stefndi ǫllum sínum mǫnnum	63r, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	43va, 3 lines, red initial, green ornaments, red rubric
ch. 125, p. 321. At Reykjum á Skeiðum bjó Runólfr	(Missing leaf)	–
ch. 126, p. 322. Flosi bjó sik austan	64r, 2 lines, missing initial, red rubric	44r, 3 lines, green initial, red ornaments, red rubric
ch. 127, p. 323. Nú er þar til máls at taka at Bergþórshváli	–	–
ch. 128, p. 325. Nú er þar til at taka, er Flosi er	65r, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	44v, 3 lines, dark red initial with red ornaments, red rubric
ch. 129, p. 328. Síðan tóku þeir eld ok gerðu bál mikit	65v, 2 lines, red initial, red rubric	45r, 3 lines, red initial, red rubric
ch. 130, p. 333. Nú er at segja frá Skarpheðni	–	–

most initials span over two lines, some span over three, one over four, and one spans over eight lines:

- 1r, ch. 1 in ÍF: 8 lines: Mǫrðr gígja is introduced (finely ornate initial)
- 2r, ch. 3 in ÍF: 3 lines: about Haraldr Gráfeldr's reign in Norway
- 3r, ch. 5 in ÍF: 3 lines: about Atli, son of Earl Arnviðr of Gotland
- 6v, ch. 9 in ÍF: 3 lines: Hallgerðr's story
- 11v, ch. 19 in ÍF: 4 lines: Gunnarr is introduced (finely ornate initial)
- 12r, ch. 20 in ÍF: 3 lines: Njáll is introduced
- 38v, ch. 77 in ÍF: 3 lines: Gunnarr gets killed
- 43r, ch. 87 in ÍF: 3 lines: Kolbeinn Arnljótarson, who helps Hrappr in the first part of the chapter, is introduced.

The larger initials may be said to define a narrative structure, with a clear focus on the political and judicial system (chs. 1, 3, 5) and Gunnarr's side of the story (chs. 9, 19, 77), even though the introduction of Njáll gets a visual emphasis as well (ch. 20). The emphasis on the introduction of Kolbeinn is maybe the only one that does not really fit the pattern. This pattern is, however, probably more visible for someone who knows the narrative, while *Njáls saga* novices may have seen the bigger initials as a hint to the importance of the specific characters or place in the narrative.

Most initials in Möðruvallabók are three-line initials, but we have a few four- and five-line initials also, exclusively in the first part of the saga and none in the section of special interest here (chs. 110–130)[13]:

- 11v, ch. 29 in ÍF: 4 lines: Gunnarr goes abroad and starts his adventures
- 17r, ch. 46 in ÍF, 5 lines: Gizurr the White is introduced
- 27v, ch. 77 in ÍF: 4 lines: Gunnarr gets killed
- 35r, ch. 95 in ÍF: 4 lines: Flosi is introduced
- 35r, ch. 96 in ÍF: 4 lines: Hallr Þorsteinsson (Síðu-Hallr) is introduced
- 36v, ch. 100 in ÍF: 5 lines: Christianity is introduced to Iceland
- 37v, ch. 103 in ÍF: 4 lines: Gestr Oddleifsson is introduced

The focus here is clearly on the first part of the story before the Christianization, on Gunnarr and his side of the clan, but also on important figures in the political and judicial system. The use of bigger initials in the first part of the saga in both manuscripts may suggest that it was given more cognitive focus by the scribes and potentially by the reader(s). Gunnarr's side of the conflict is highlighted to a greater degree in both manuscripts, with the exception of Njáll's introduction in Reykjabók. Whether this colored the potential for interpretation of the acts of revenge differently, we will return to below.

Initials in ÍF, Reykjabók, and Möðruvallabók

The first main and most obvious observation from the analysis of the initials of the two manuscripts is that the chapters given in the main ÍF edition do not always correspond to the "chapters" in the two manuscripts. The introduction of the edition states that it is based on the Möðruvallabók version (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 161), but the editor has not always been faithful to his manuscript's chapter structure. The chapter structure of the edited text is thus a

13 The whole saga is 159 chapters long.

construction that does not represent any actual manuscript version of *Njáls saga*.[14] Most relevant for us here is that there are also differences between the two manuscripts – sometimes a new chapter is introduced at a certain place in the saga in one of the manuscripts where there is no new chapter in the other manuscript. Despite these variances, it has to be emphasized that the chapter structure of the saga in the two manuscripts is the same to a large degree.

One difference between the chapters in ÍF and the two manuscripts concerns the length of the chapters. On a few occasions, at places where there is a new chapter in the edition, there is no initial in either of the manuscripts. The first example is in ch. 126, when Flosi and his men are getting ready to travel to Bergþórshváll: the troops get together gradually on the way, and the only one missing is Ingjaldr of Keldur. The edition then changes the focus by starting a new chapter, ch. 127: "Nú er þar til máls at taka at Bergþórshváli" (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 323) (To turn now to Bergthorshvol) (Cook 1997, 152). None of our manuscripts have a new chapter at this narrative spot, which suggests that the two clusters of events – Flosi and his men on their way to Bergþórsváll and Njáll and his family in their house – were to be read as interconnected events, functioning as one narrative unit. In the edition and in both manuscripts, the next chapter comes when the focus returns to Flosi: "Nú er þar til at taka, er Flosi er" (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 325) (To turn now to Flosi) (Cook 1997, 153).

The same happens again with the most dramatic scene of the saga, i.e., the burning of Njáll's family in their house. The two manuscripts give the whole event in one chapter, from the moment when the fire is made up in front of the door (ch. 129 in the edition) to Flosi exclaiming "Nú hǫfum vér fingit mikinn mannskaða" (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 338) (We have just suffered a great loss) (Cook 1997, 160), followed by him and the others riding up to the mountain Þríhyrningr. This passage is written on fols. 65v–68r in Reykjabók and fols. 45r–46v in Möðruvallabók. In both manuscripts, these are easily the longest chapters in the whole saga. In the edition, a new chapter begins in the middle of the scene, when the "camera" zooms in on Skarpheðinn, who tries to run up the beam after Kári but fails and thus understands that death awaits him. These two examples indicate that the two manuscripts that we are investigating seem to cluster longer series of events into the same narrative unit, compared to the ÍF edition. There may be different reasons for this, but it may seem that the

14 The chapter division in ÍF in general seems to be based on the division created by Konráð Gíslason and Eiríkur Jónsson in their edition (1875–89). For a more detailed discussion on the editorial history of the saga and the work of various editors over time, see Lönnroth 1975, 52–53.

literary device of the "cliff-hanger" at the end of chapters is more actively used in the modern edition than in the medieval manuscripts.

The fact that the ÍF edition introduces new chapters at places which are not marked by initials in our medieval manuscripts may of course be based on the usage of a different manuscript. Since this is, however, unclear, it may also suggest that the modern editor is using the introduction of a new chapter as a narrative technique to increase the suspense more actively. It may of course be debated whether the medieval scribes were not aware of the technique to the same degree, or just chose not to use it at these specific moments. From the perspective of a reading self, it is more natural to have a break in the reading session at the end of a chapter, than in the middle of a chapter. This suggests that the medieval readers of our manuscripts were most probably intended to read these important scenes in one go. These observations do not prioritize any of the three possible readings of the revenge sequence which are all realistic options.

The Killing of Hǫskuldr Episode

The first difference between the manuscripts in our section of the text is the structuring of the episode of the killing of Hǫskuldr. In Reykjabók, a red two-line initial appears on fol. 56r (see Fig. 1): "Þat var einn dag, at Mǫrðr kom til Bergþórshváls" (One day Mǫrðr came to Bergþórshváls). The rest of the chapter, which in Reykjabók spans over eight lines, tells us how Mǫrðr continuously talks behind Hǫskuldr's back to Skarpheðinn and his brothers, he provokes them and urges them to kill him, adding that Hǫskuldr would probably kill them first, if they do not kill him. In this chapter, Skarpheðinn declares that he will kill Hǫskuldr; Njáll makes it clear that he does not know what his sons are planning; and finally, Njáll's sons, Kári, and Mǫrðr take their weapons, ride to Ossabœr, where Hǫskuldr lives, and wait until dawn. The chapter ends: "veðr var gott ok sól upp komin" (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 280) (The weather was good and the sun had risen) (Cook 1997, 132). This last sentence is flanked around a red rubric (which is unreadable), which marks the beginning of the next chapter, in addition to a red initial "I" in the margin: "Í þenna tíma vaknaði Hǫkuldr . . ." (see quote above, see Fig. 1). This chapter includes the killing of Hǫskuldr, followed by a discussion of the best possible strategy of how to make the news known. Njáll's sons and Kári go back home and tell Njáll. The latter is heartbroken and speaks the famous words "mér þœtti betra at hafa látit tvá sonu mína ok væri Hǫskuldr á lífi." (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 281) (I would rather have lost two of my sons, as long as Hoskuld were still alive) (Cook 1997, 133), and he professes his own and his

Figs. 1 and 2: Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Collection, AM 468 4to, fol. 56r and fol. 56v. Photograph: Suzanne Reitz. Published with permission from the Arnamagnæan Institute.

family's death. The chapter ends: "Sjá einn hlutr var svá, at Njáli fell svá nær, at hann mátti aldri ókløkkvandi um tala" (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 281) (This was the only thing that ever touched Njal so deeply that he could never speak of it without crying) (Cook 1997, 133) (see Fig. 2).

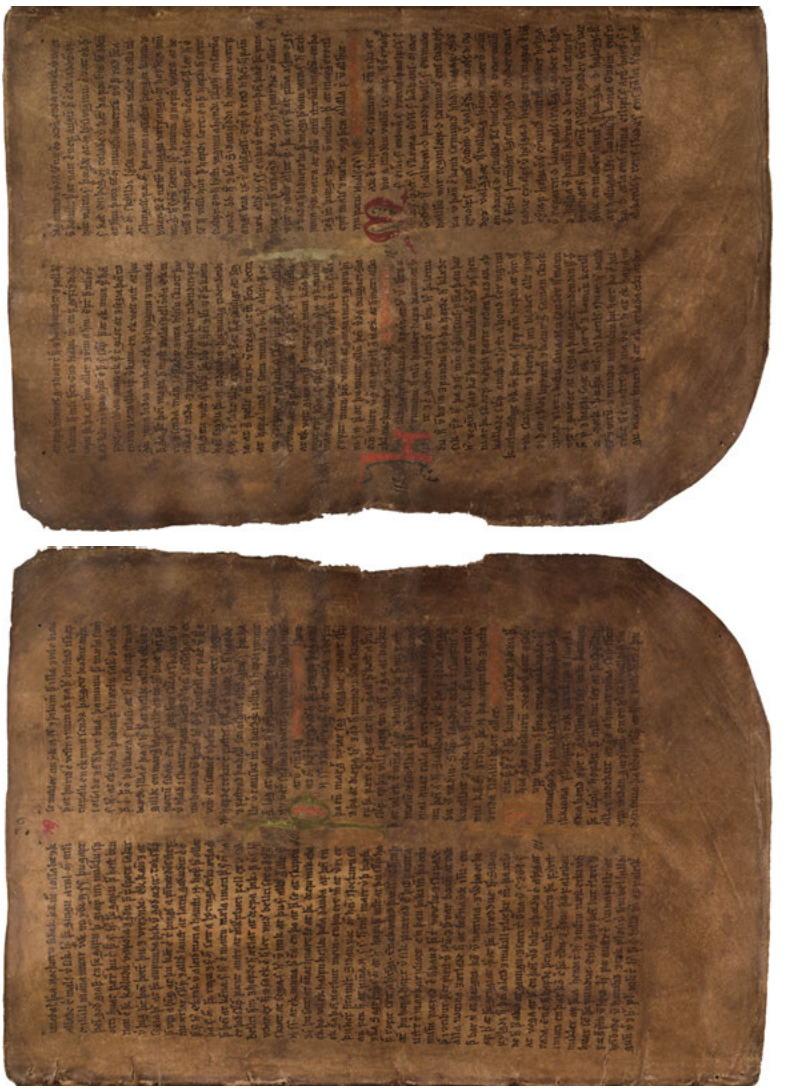
The same episode is structured slightly differently in Möðruvallabók. Here we have an initial at the beginning of the same sentence: "Þat var einn dag, at Mǫrðr kom til Bergþórshváls" (see fol. 39r, Fig. 3). The initial is green with red ornamentations and also flanked by a red rubric. The next initial, however, appears at a different spot, initiating the sentence: "Þeir fóru þar til, er þeir kómu til Ossabœ . . ." The sentence telling us about Hǫskuldr waking up is not initiated by an initial. However, the chapter continues in the same manner and ends with the same sentence about Njáll's sorrow and tears (see 39v, Fig. 4).

If meaning is to be constructed based on the visuality and the narrative structure of the two versions, it may be said that Reykjabók focuses on the arrival of Mǫrðr at Bergþórshváll, which ultimately leads to the following tragedy, and on Hǫskuldr waking up and preparing for his sowing. Möðruvallabók, on the other hand, also focuses on the arrival of Mǫrðr, but then stays focused on the gang of men who are on the way to Ossabœ. Hǫskuldr of course gets just as much attention, but focus stays with Njáll's sons. It is impossible to draw too great a conclusion about the meaning of the revenge episode based on this example only, but the impression from these passages is that Reykjabók focuses in on Hǫskuldr, at a place while Möðruvallabók stays with Skarpheðinn and his brothers. Further analysis may confirm whether the two versions of the saga are inclined towards one or the other side of the conflict and how that would condition the interpretation by the reading self.

Initial Program in Möðruvallabók

Another major difference between the two manuscripts in the section in focus is that Möðruvallabók has initials in a few places where Reykjabók does not.[15] Examples in Reykjabók include the important scene when Hildigunnr, Hǫskuldr's widow, receives a visit from Flosi, where she eggs him on indirectly (with the towel and the high seat) and more directly (with the bloodied cloak) to avenge the death of her husband; when he speaks the famous words "eru kǫld kvenna ráð"

15 This is also a conclusion drawn by Lönnroth (1975, 21), based on the study of all the initials in the two manuscripts. He formulates this differently, by stating that R tends to omit divisions of the author's text, while M tends to include superfluous ones.



Figs. 3 and 4: The Arni Magnusson Institute for Icelandic Studies, AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, fol. 39r and fol. 39v. Published with permission from The Arni Magnusson Institute for Icelandic Studies.

(Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 292) (Cold are the councils of women) (Cook 1997, 137); and when Flosi starts negotiations with Ingjaldr to get support at the *Alþing* – all of these major events are crammed into one chapter. In Möðruvallabók, the same section is divided into two more logical episodes – one chapter includes the scene when Flosi visits Hildigunnr, introduced by a red initial and a red rubric (fol. 40rb), and another chapter, introduced by a green initial and a red rubric (40vb), tells us of Ingjaldr: "Ingjaldr bjó at Keldum" (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 292) (Ingjaldr lived at Keldur) (Cook 1997, 137), and how Flosi seeks his help in the future. So again, if we think of the initials as a way to emphasize narrative focus, Möðruvallabók has more numerous changes of foci and indicates visually when there is a change in scene.

A similar thing happens when the narrative is at the *Alþing* and Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson and Njáll's sons are going from booth to booth to ask for help after they have killed Hǫskuldr. This is the scene when Skarpheðinn grins and manages on each occasion to provoke and scare all the people whom they visit. In both manuscripts a new chapter is introduced when Ásgrímr and his companions go to the booth of Þorkell "Bully." Skarpheðinn grins as he usually does, and a conflict arises between them. The two provoke each other and Skarpheðinn jumps at Þorkell with his axe, ready to kill him unless Þorkell sits down. Þorkell does sit down, and the narrator adds "ok hafði hvárki orðit á fyrir jonum áðr né síðan" (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 305) (such a thing never happened to him before or after) (Cook 1997, 144). In Reykjabók, the chapter continues to relate that when Guðmundr the Powerful hears about what has happened, he changes his mind and promises to support Njáll's sons at the court. In Möðruvallabók, however, this last scene is given in a separate chapter on fol. 42vr, starting with: "Guðmundr inn ríki hafði spurn af . . ." (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 306) (Gudmund the Powerful had learned what had happened . . .) (Cook 1997, 144). Once again, the introduction of a new chapter is logical, as the focus of the scene actually changes.

Not only are there more initials in Möðruvallabók compared to Reykjabók, but the initial program in the former manuscript may be characterized as generally more complex than the one in the latter. In Reykjabók, there are only red initials. Note, however, that there are some missing initials, which may be due to fading away or to an intention for them to be drawn in a different color. Even if that was the case, the frequency of potential variation in color of the initials is much lower in Reykjabók than in Möðruvallabók. The only other initial that distinguishes itself in Reykjabók is the *littera florrissa* on fol. 1r [Fig. 5], marking the beginning of the saga with a finely ornate 8-line initial.

In Möðruvallabók, on the other hand, the complexity in the initial program is realized through a variation in color, in ornamentation, and in size. There are light-red, dark-red, and green initials, some of them with fine ornamentations

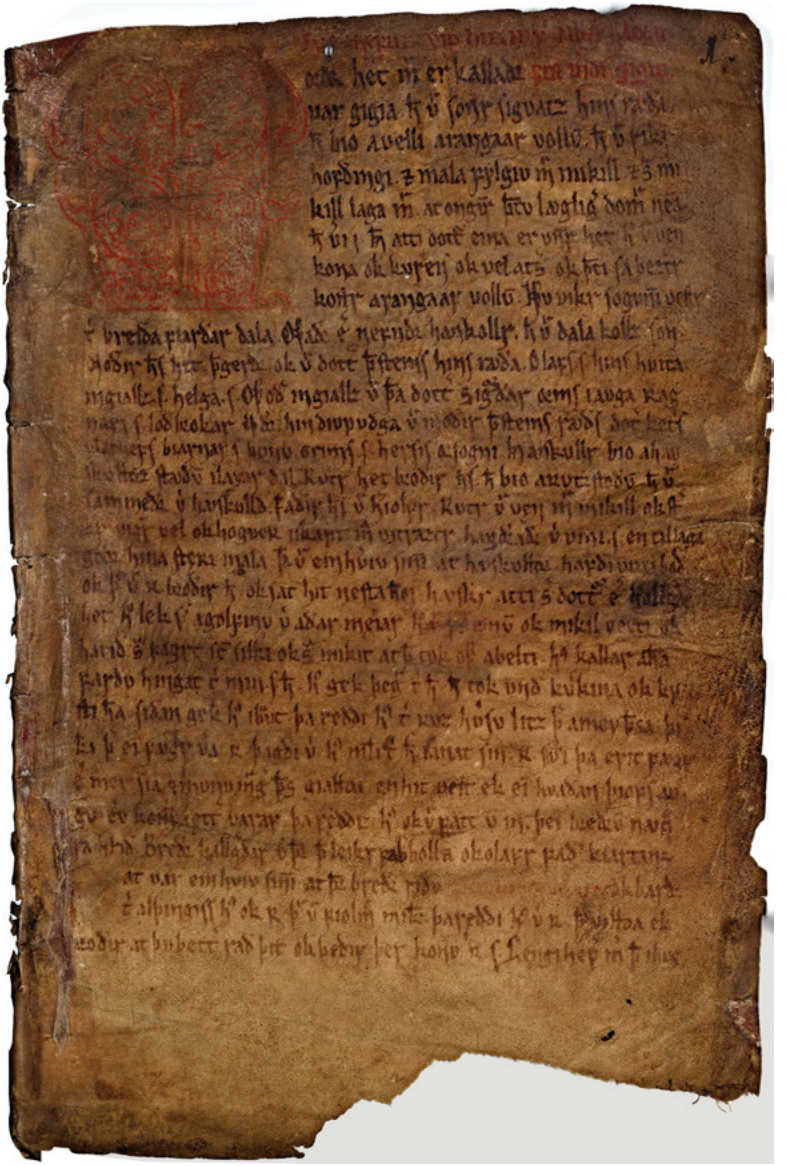


Fig. 5: Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Collection, AM 468 4to, fol. 1r. Photograph: Suzanne Reitz. Published with permission from the Arnamagnæan Institute.

(see Table 1 for specifications). All in all, the red initials are greater in number than the green, and a working hypothesis may be that the green initials would have marked the more narratively significant places in the story. The reasoning is that the graphical elements, i.e., initials in green, used more rarely in the graphic program would stand out when the saga was visually perceived. Ideally, this hypothesis can be tested by studying the use of green initials in the whole manuscript, but because of the scope of the article, here the hypothesis will be tested through a closer analysis of the content of the chapters starting with green initials in the chosen section of the saga and juxtapose these to the content of the sections in between. The green initials mark the beginning of the following chapters and alternate with sections containing a number of red initials:

- Fol. 39rb, ch. 110 in ÍF: Mǫrðr arrives at Bergþórshváll and provokes Njáll's sons to kill Hǫskuldr.
  - 3 chapters starting with red initials, including the killing of Hǫskuldr. Njáll's sons start looking for supporters straight away. Hildigunnr discovers that Hǫskuldr is dead, wipes off all the blood from his dead body and wraps the clotted blood in his cloak. Guðmunðr the powerful is introduced.
- Fol. 40ra, ch. 114 in ÍF: Snorri goði from Helgafell is introduced,whom Ásgrímr Elliða-Griímsson asks for support on behalf of Njáll's sons. Snorri will play an important role in the upcoming case at the *Alþing*.
- Fol. 40ra, ch. 115 in ÍF: Flosi hears about the killing of Hǫskuldr and starts gathering people to support him at the *Alþing*.
  - 1 chapter with red initial: Flosi goes to Hildigunnr; the episode with the towel and the high seat and her demands for vengence.
- Fol. 40vb, second part of ch. 116 in ÍF: Ingjaldr of Keldur is introduced. He promises help to Flosi, but then fails to turn up when he is actually needed. This was one of the extra initials, see above.
  - 6 chapters with red initials: the text goes back and forward from one group building alliances, to the other doing the same, including the moment when Skarpheðinn almost kills Þorkell "Bully."
- Fol. 42vr, ch. 122 in ÍF: Njáll speaks about his love for Hǫskuldr at the *Alþing* and asks to make a settlement for the slaying of Hǫskuldr.
  - 2 chapters with red initials, including the scene where Njáll adds the silver cloak and a pair of boots on top of the pile of money. The settlement is broken and Flosi is chosen as the leader with one main goal only – revenge! The dream vision of the rider with a torch setting a huge fire, also called a witch-ride.
- Fol. 44r, ch. 126 in ÍF: Flosi gathers his troops on the way to Bergþórshváll,

– 2 chapters with red initials: people at Bergþórshváll get ready; Flosi's group arrives; women and children are let out. Everyone dies except for Kári. Flosi and his men stay at the fire the whole night and go after the one who betrayed them and kills him too.

The green initials do indeed mark important narrative moments in the saga, giving a narrative skeleton of the plot. It may certainly be debated whether seeing this narrative skeleton depends on being acquainted with the saga, or whether the initials would be useful for a reader who does not know the saga to understand the narrative better. The main tendency is that the green initials emphasize the two sides of the story alternatively: they jump from focusing on Skarpheðinn, his brothers, and their supporters (ch. 110–114); to Flosi and his troops, and their supporters (ch. 115–116); to Njáll's attempt for a settlement (ch. 122); to finally focus in on Flosi's gang on their way to committing the burning (ch. 126).

On the other hand, the sections with the red initials contain many of the most important scenes: the killing of Hǫskuldr; Hildigunnr urging vengeance; the breaking down of the settlement; the burning of Njáll and his family. Therefore, if we judge the importance of the narrative elements based on the positions and number of the green vs the red initials, it could be argued that the green initials emphasize the two sides of the conflict, the two groups and their supporters, and the judicial system that deals with such conflicts, all of which emerges as the most important narrative scheme. The sections with the red initials, on the other hand, emphasize a different rhythm in the narrative, clustering the most important core scenes of the narrative together.

Relating this back to the three possible meanings of the revenge series, it may seem that the way the green initials are used highlights the sides of both parties and the demand for action in an honor-based society. The sections with the red initials, on the other hand, based on the initials' density and the content of the chapters, seem to present the core narrative. The hypothesis, presented above, should therefore be adjusted: the green initials do not mark the significant narrative moments, rather they mark the change in focus, the turning points between the significant narrative moments which are given in the sections marked by dense use of red initials. Once again, this hypothesis may be tested by studying the role of red and green initials in the rest of the saga and the manuscript as a whole, but this has to be done in a different context. All in all, the fact that Möðruvallabók has a more intense initial program (number and variation of initials) compared to Reykjabók may suggest that the former scribe perhaps used the initials as a narrative tool more actively than the latter.

The Narrative Function of the Initials and Making Sense of the Acts of Revenge

Two main conclusions may be drawn from the comparison of the initials in the two manuscripts of *Njáls saga*, one about the very nature of the initial programs in the manuscripts and another about the reading selves' potential for creation of meaning based on such initial programs.

The division into chapters is predominantly the same in the two manuscripts. Nonetheless, some differences exist, for example, in the structuring of the episode of the killing of Hǫskuldr. In Reykjabók, the "camera" zooms in on Hǫskuldr, while in Möðruvallabók, the focus stays with Njáll and his gang. In general, Möðruvallabók has more initials, meaning more chapters, than Reykjabók, and the initials vary in color (red and green) which increases and intensifies the visual beat of the narrative. The green initials in Möðruvallabók, fewer in number than the red ones, seem to be used to emphasize the change of focus in the narrative from one important saga section to another. In both manuscripts, most of the initials are of the same size, but important narrative moments are emphasized by bigger initials. In Reykjabók, these bigger initials appear in the first part of the saga; they mark the beginning of the text, and chapters telling about Gunnarr and his part of the story, even though the introduction of Njáll is also visually emphasized. In Möðruvallabók, the focus is also on the first part of the story, on Gunnarr and Flosi, but also on individuals important to the Christianization process, such as Gizurr the White.

These conclusions have further implications for the reading selves' potential for creation of meaning based on such initial programs. Above, three possible explanations for the killing of Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði were presented. The episode could be interpreted from a Christian perspective, based on the fact that Hǫskuldr's death is described as the death of a martyr; from a social perspective in an honor-based society, suggesting that he is killed because he was the responsible chieftain; and from cognitive-emotional perspective, suggesting that he dies because of Skarpheðinn's feelings of jealousy, which trigger a desire for revenge.

This analysis of the initials in connection with the interpretation of the acts of revenge leads to the following conclusions: the most coherent result is that the initial program in Möðruvallabók is more active than the one in Reykjabók – based on the number of initials and their variation in size and colors. The scribe seems to have used the tool more actively, possibly because of his competence, the resources available at the scribal center, the type of manuscript that he was writing. No matter what the reason was, the meaning-making process for a reading self would

have been activated to a greater degree when reading Möðruvallabók, compared to Reykjabók.

Further, the Christianization was visually emphasized in both manuscripts, based on the placement of the larger initials. Reykjabók shifts the "camera focus" from one side of the conflict to the other in the episode of Hǫskuldr's killing and highlights visually through larger initials the introduction of both Gunnarr *and* Njáll. On the other hand, Möðruvallabók stays focused on Skarpheðinn when Hǫskuldr is killed, and highlights Gunnarr and his people through larger initials. This may suggest that the Reykjabók version of the saga inspires an interpretation that balances the responsibilities of two kin-groups for a revenge series in an honor-based society, while Möðruvallabók gives more cognitive focus to Skarpheðinn and thus possibly promotes his guilt and the martyr-like death of Hǫskuldr.

All of these are naturally just hypotheses for how the initial programs may have triggered the cognitive meaning-creation process for a reading self. Apart from the few elements pointing towards an emphasis on the Christian framing of the saga in Möðruvallabók, and towards an emphasis on the feud between the two kin-groups in Reykjabók, the chapter structure defined by the initials in the two manuscripts may be said to be so open that it allows for all three explanations of the series of acts of revenge that were presented above.

Lars Lönnroth analyzed the structure of the saga based on initials, conducting a close analysis of the beginning of the saga and Hallgerðr's first marriage. He concluded that "the spurious chapter division in the *Njála* editions have tended to obscure the real structure of the narrative" (1975, 77). In other words, the structure and meaning of the saga is clearer when the manuscripts are used. Further, he discussed the *author's text, without allowing for the scribes to have changed the structures themselves. He concluded that the author's techniques were sophisticated, and that they increased the artistic effect of his saga, while other Icelandic scribes used initials just as a practical index for readers leafing through the manuscript (1975, 79). This analysis, albeit focusing on a different section of the saga, naturally enough (because of the new philological starting point), demonstrates that scribes of the various manuscripts explored the potential of the graphic tools they had at their disposal to a varying degree. No one knowns what the *author's text looked like, and it is clear that the manuscript material we have preserved reveals the scribes', and not the author's, varying sophistication, artistic awareness, and intentions. This is in line with the results of other studies of the materiality of manuscripts of *Njáls saga*, for example, by Lethbridge (2014).

Freedom of Interpretation

At first glance, this may seem as a negative result of the analysis, pointing to a lack of link between the materiality of the text and a clear message in the text. However, this is a very interesting result if juxtaposed with other studies of graphic structuring of medieval texts. As presented above, the graphic organizations of some thirteenth-century manuscripts, such as the main manuscripts of *The King's Mirror* and *Barlaams saga*, seem to have a clear correlation with the main messages of the texts. Of course, it has to be added that, even though *The King's Mirror* and *Barlaams saga* are complex texts with many various meanings, the main functions of the texts themselves are not very controversial, as they were both most probably meant to have an edifying, pedagogical function in the socio-cultural context of the thirteenth-century Norwegian court, where they were produced and read. This suggests that the graphical appearance of the manuscripts, the way the texts were organized and written down on the manuscript page, served to enhance this inherent and intended function. We also saw that one of the *Njáls saga* manuscript, AM 133 fol., seems to reflect the same courtly culture through the illuminated initials in it as well.

The analysis of the two *Njáls saga* manuscripts in this article has shown something different. *Njáls saga*, being of a different genre, is open to interpretation to a very different degree compared to texts like *The King's Mirror* and *Barlaams saga*. Based on both content and illuminated initials, scholars have discussed whether the narrative is motivated by the Christian mentality of the writer and scribe, or by the norms of the pre-Christian honor-based society which is portrayed in the saga, or by a combination of these two, spiced up with human emotional triggers, universal for all cultures. The analysis of the *mise en page* of Reykjabók and Möðruvallabók shows that this potential for various interpretation is also reflected or supported by the graphic organization of the text. By not giving us clear guiding principles for what main message to take home from the saga, with the exception of a few hints, the scribes of the two manuscripts leave the process of interpretation and reflection to the reading self.

All manuscripts mentioned in this study – the two studied in detailed, but also the main manuscripts of *The King's Mirror* and *Barlaams saga* – were produced in the same cultural context of Norway and Iceland, at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth. Without describing the network of socio-political and literary agents at this time in detail, it may be mentioned that there were plenty of individuals, Norwegians and Icelanders, who had close connections to the royal house and the court and who were literary producers or patrons. The most obvious examples from the thirteenth century are Snorri Sturluson (1178/79–1241) and Sturla Þórðarson (1214–1284), as

well as Haukr Erlendsson (d. 1334). Their individual writership / patronship provides plenty of evidence that the two literary sub-systems – the edifying literature meant for the royal court, on the one hand, and the Sagas of Icelanders, on the other – were written and read in the same socio-cultural circles.[16]

The principles for writing down texts in this cultural and literary context were thus common – texts were structured by illuminated and ornate initials, by initials of different size and color, and other graphical emphases. However, this study shows that the textual production in this context enabled different processes of interpreting and making sense of texts and manuscripts. In more formal, Latinized contexts, such as those that produced *The King's Mirror* and *Barlaams saga*, interpretation of a text was strictly guided by the texts' content and materiality – the readers were more or less explicitly instructed in what the text meant. In other contexts, however, scribes wrote down texts which had a content and graphic structure that encouraged freer interpretation. The reader, as well as potentially his listeners (if the reader cared to vocalize the graphic structure of the text when reading), could thus have various options when making sense of the multimodality of their books. The freedom of interpretation and cognitive creativity seems to have been steered by the genre of the text. Some genres had a more explicit edifying meaning, which was reflected in their content, structure, and materiality, while other genres were meant to allow a higher degree of freedom for individual interpretation of the reading self. As mentioned, according to cognitive sciences, making sense of multimodal cultural expressions entails the blending of all their elements. This study has shown how different meaning construction processes may have been triggered by medieval scribes when they wrote their texts and manuscripts. Stories of revenge and honor may thus be seen as medieval page-turners inviting and challenging the writing and reading selves to be creative in their writing and interpreting strategies.

16 For an in-depth analysis of this issue, with a special focus on Reykholt at the time of Snorri and later, see Johansson (2018).

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Ole-Albert Rønning Nordby

The Self in Legal Procedure: Oath-Taking as Individualism in Norwegian Medieval Law

Abstract: This article examines an institution in Norwegian medieval law wherein a defendant in a case could swear an individual oath in order to unilaterally dismiss the charges against them. By analyzing three law books dating to the late twelfth, the mid-thirteenth, and the late-thirteenth centuries respectively, I show that this individual oath, called the *einseiðr*, started to be used as a proof in very small property disputes. From the mid-thirteenth century onwards, its use was considerably expanded to include cases where it was necessary to prove the defendant's intention or their knowledge of the circumstances of a case. I argue that this development can be explained by influence from the theological distinction between intentional and unintentional sin, as well as from theories of oath-taking in canon law, and the Roman calumny oath.

Keywords: oath, procedure, law, church law, Canon law, right, intention

In medieval Europe it was common to use oaths as proof in legal cases. These oaths were usually sworn with a number of oath-helpers, meaning people who swore together with the defendant and guaranteed the veracity of their claim (Engelmann 1928, 155–6; Helmholz 1983). While this practice of judicial oath-taking began to wane in most of Europe during the High Middle Ages,[1] it persisted through the Middle Ages and into early modernity in Norway, where the practice was regulated in detail in statutory law books. Examining the regulation in these law books is useful when seeking to understand the medieval self, because although judicial oaths were usually sworn in groups, they could also, under certain

1 The reason for this seems to have been the rise of a procedural system based on Roman and canon law, used in both ecclesiastical and secular courts, in which a judge examined witnesses and written documents and weighed this evidence before coming to a conclusion (van Caenegem 1991).

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circumstances, be sworn by the defendant alone. In the following, I will use the law books of high medieval Norway, and the way in which they regulate individual oath-taking, to analyze how, why, and to what extent medieval law accommodated and valued individual agency. In doing so, I will also show that the role of the self in Norwegian law was dramatically expanded in the High Middle Ages, largely as a result of influence from canon and Roman law.

In doing so, I will re-examine and deconstruct a categorization which has been common, albeit not universal, in the historiography of the medieval self. Two distinct but complementary ways of understanding the self are especially relevant here. On the one hand, the self can be understood politically, in the sense that individuals were increasingly perceived as having certain essential rights, such as the right to property or to participation in government. This political variety of individualism has been studied most notably by Walter Ullmann, who traces the idea of the citizen back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and connects it to the rediscovery of the political philosophy of Aristotle (Ullmann 1967). On the other hand, the self could be viewed more abstractly, as what Colin Morris has called "self-awareness and self-expression, (. . .) the freedom of man to declare himself without paying excessive attention to the demands of convention or the dictates of authority" (Morris 1995, 7). Here, the emphasis would not be on the individual as a bearer of rights but on the individual as a person able to stand out against the collective social structures surrounding them. Morris argues that the intellectual ferment of the twelfth century was the beginning of a growing sense of importance of the self, a "discovery of the individual" (Morris 1995). This dichotomy between individualism as political right, and individualism as personal expression, has been pervasive in the historiography of the self, notably also in the Scandinavian historiography, as exemplified by the influential work of Sverre Bagge (Bagge 1998, 22–32).

In this chapter, I will seek to deconstruct this dichotomy by analyzing the agency of individuals in medieval legal procedure, looking at how the Norwegian medieval laws regulate individuals swearing oaths in legal procedure. Usually, judicial oaths would be supported by oath-helpers, who guaranteed that to the best of their knowledge, the statements of the principal oath-taker were true. In medieval and early modern Norwegian law, oaths could be sworn with two, five, or eleven oath-helpers, depending on the severity of the case, but the number of oath-helpers was different, and often higher, elsewhere in Europe. The severity of the case also determined whether the defendant could pick their oath-helpers freely, in which case they only had to have reached the age of majority, or whether the oath-helpers were selected from a pool of people nominated by

defendant and plaintiff together, in which case legal status, impartiality, and past convictions of perjury set limits on who could be oath-helpers.[2]

However, as we have seen, not all oaths required oath-helpers. The *einseiðr*, or single oath, could be sworn by the defendant alone, and in the appropriate cases it was just as valid as a legal proof as oaths sworn with oath-helpers. The *einseiðr* was therefore a legal institution which allowed for considerable individual agency in the medieval legal procedure. Because oaths were a sufficient proof, meaning that the oath in itself was enough to settle a case conclusively in the oath-taker's favor (Engelmann 1928, 155–6), the *einseiðr* in effect allowed a defendant to unilaterally reject a legal accusation. Analyzing when the *einseiðr* was permissible, then, can grant insights into how the self could interact with the law, and what room for manoeuvre individuals were permitted.

Sources

I will base this analysis on three law books from medieval Norway. First, the *Gulaþingslög*, which was a provincial law for the western region of Norway. As it has come down to us, the law contains multiple chronological layers of regulation which have been compiled into one law book. The earliest extant fragment of this compilation probably dates to around 1200, but the only complete manuscript, Codex Rantzovianus, or DonVar 137 4°, is younger, dating to around 1250 (Rindal 1993, 15, 18). It is not uncommon to argue that the law book as we know it is much older than this, with some scholars arguing that it was written down as early as the first half of the eleventh century (Rindal 1993, 9–12; Nedkvitne 2004, 75–6). However, given that we lack any extant examples of vernacular writing from this period, and that the extant fragments and manuscript are much younger, I am hesitant to date the compiled *Gulaþingslög* to much earlier than the late-twelfth century, although parts of the text are clearly older.

My second main source will be the *Frostaþingslög*, which was a provincial law for the region of Trøndelag. The extant version of the law was most likely enacted in 1260, but like the *Gulaþingslög* it also contains several chronological layers. We know, for example, that it was heavily revised in the mid-twelfth century, as I will discuss later in this chapter. The *Frostaþingslög* is not extant

2 Hamre 1958; Næss 1991; Rønning Nordby 2018, 113–53. The medieval Norwegian law books also allowed women to swear oaths and to function as oath-helpers. There seems to have been a principle that when a woman was the main defendant, her oath-helpers would also have to be women, and vice versa (Rønning Nordby 2018, 146–9).

in any complete medieval manuscripts, but rather in paper copies of Codex Resenianus, which burned in 1728, as well as in some small medieval fragments (Hagland and Sandnes 1994, xxvi, xxxi).

Finally, I will use the *Landslög*, which supplanted the earlier provincial laws and was valid in the entire Norwegian kingdom, and which was enacted by King Magnús VI (r. 1263–1280) in 1274. Unlike the earlier provincial laws, the *Landslög* comes down to us in numerous manuscripts, due to the fact that the law was in use for centuries after its enactment. Thirty-nine manuscripts from the period between 1275 and 1400 contain the entire law book, which can also be found in some two hundred fragments (Horn 2016, 4–5). Although there are significant differences between these manuscripts, as a new critical edition of the law has shown (Rindal and Spørck 2018), the differences in content is not major enough as to alter the argument of this chapter.[3]

The provincial laws of the *Gulaþing* and the *Frostaþing* had sections at their beginnings dealing with spiritual and ecclesiastical matters. These so-called church laws were inspired by learned canon law but also had a strong element of customary law.[4] In the *Frostaþingslög*, the *einseiðr* is very common in the church law, but we cannot track whether this trend continued in the *Landslög*, because the latter does not have a section on church law. The reason for this was a conflict between Magnús VI and Archbishop Jón of Nidaros. King Magnús wanted his law book to include a section of church law, as previous Norwegian law books had done, while the archbishop was opposed to this because he denied that the crown had any jurisdiction over matters of church law, which he saw as belonging exclusively to the Church (Sunde 2005, 125). The compromise was to enact Magnús's law without the traditional first section regulating spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs.[5]

Analyzing the *einseiðr* from the perspective of normative legal texts is a necessity, because there is very little evidence for legal practice surviving from the period prior to the late Middle Ages, and as far as I am aware, none of these legal records deal with the *einseiðr* explicitly. However, this normative

3 Of course, the large number of extant manuscripts transmitting the *Landslög* also raises the question of similar variation between manuscripts of the earlier provincial laws. We know that such variation existed; there are significant differences between the paper copies of Codex Resenianus and other fragments containing the *Frostaþingslög*. However, given that so few witnesses to the provincial laws survive, we cannot be certain about the magnitude of manuscript variation.

4 For a thorough discussion of Norwegian church law and the ways in which it was inspired by canon law, see (Landro 2010).

5 Archbishop Jón also enacted his own book of church law, but it contains few rules regulating oath-taking and I will therefore not use it here.

perspective is valuable precisely because it allows us to investigate perceptions of individual agency and the self among the elite of thirteenth-century Norway.

The *Einseiðr* in the Provincial Laws

One of the most curious features of the *einseiðr* in Norwegian law is the way in which it grew in prominence. In the *Gulaþingslög* the *einseiðr* is rare. It is only mentioned in one example of a case, where the oath can be used to deny very small debts, at the value of one *eyrir* (*Den ældre Gulathings-Lov* 1846, ch. 23): a sum which could normally be exchanged for small goods like shoes, clothes, and firewood (Gullbekk 2009, 235–9). We find the same rule in the *Frostaþingslög* and the *Landslög* as well (*Den ældre Frostathings-Lov* 1846, ch. 5:42; *Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 8:2), but in these two later law books, the *einseiðr* is applied to other circumstances as well. The very limited application of this oath in the *Gulaþingslög* therefore suggests that sometime prior to the year 1200 (we cannot be certain when), a purgation oath sworn by the principal alone had been established as a mode of proof in Norwegian law, albeit a marginal one, used in very specific cases having to do with denying economic claims.

The *Gulaþingslög* also tells us that, unlike other judicial oaths, which had to be sworn in a church with elaborate rules for how oath-helpers and witnesses should be summoned, the *einseiðr* could be sworn anywhere and at any time, so long as the oath-taker had a book upon which to swear (*Den ældre Gulathings-Lov* 1846, ch. 135). In disputes over very low amounts, it must have seemed unreasonable and impractical to mobilize a local community to participate in and observe ordinary oaths of denial. It would have required too much preparation, in the form of summoning and selecting oath-helpers, and too much of an elaborate ritual. In these small cases, where there was little economic value or social status at stake, setting all those gears in motion would have been overkill. Allowing a defendant to swear and deny an accusation without the support of oath-helpers, and without an elaborate ritual, provided such a remedy.

To some extent, the application of the *einseiðr* in the *Frostaþingslög* seems to build directly on the principle established in the *Gulaþingslög* that the *einseiðr* should only be used in conflicts over limited value. When the oath is applied to property disputes in the *Frostaþingslög*, the property in question is always of low value. In addition to the rule governing debt denial, which we find in all the major medieval Norwegian law books, we can read that property from shipwrecks could be claimed with the *einseiðr* by the person who owned the land onto which the wreck had drifted, if the goods were worth less than

three *aurar* (plural of *eyrir*). A value above that amount required the *lýrittareiðr*, sworn with two oath-helpers (*Den ældre Frostathings-Lov* 1846, ch. 2:35). A similar but much more vague rule deals with the intention to damage property. Here, the *lýrittareiðr* is seen as the most natural way to deny one's guilt, but the *einseiðr* should be used when the case was less serious (*Den ældre Frostathings-Lov* 1846, ch. 4:37). Thus, the application of the *einseiðr* in the *Frostaþingslög* does provide some support for the notion that the oath could have entered into the procedural system through debt denial. Once it had a legitimate role, it could then be applied to other similar disputes where there was little of material value at stake.

However, unlike the *Gulaþingslög*, the *Frostaþingslög* does not apply the *einseiðr* only to property disputes. Arguably, the most striking feature of the *einseiðr* as it appears in the *Frostaþingslög* is its very prominent position in the church law. The church laws were separate sections of the Norwegian medieval law books which dealt with ecclesiastical and spiritual matters. The church law can be found in the second section of the *Frostaþingslög*, and here the *einseiðr* seems to be the default mode of proof, as it figures in cases which seem relatively casual, as well as those having to do with life and death, salvation and damnation. On the less serious end of the scale, we find that the *einseiðr* can be used to deny things like refusal to help move corpses, as well as a number of offenses involving holy days, such as not coming to mass or employing someone to work. The oath can also deny knowledge that a holy day was taking place, if one was caught working on that day. We also find the *einseiðr* applied to more serious cases having to do with perjury, marriage, and even infanticide: a midwife could swear by herself, on behalf of a householder charged with infanticide, that a newborn infant had not been exposed but was stillborn, and the householder himself could singlehandedly deny that if a child had been exposed, it did not happen at his command (*Den ældre Frostathings-Lov* 1846, ch. 2:15, 28, 29, 32). Even when it comes to one of the Church's most important sources of income, the tithe, the *Frostaþingslög* allows for the *einseiðr* as a satisfactory proof. The amount of tithe paid by a household would, of course, depend on the economic output of that household, but if a householder were accused of not saving up for the eventual payment of tithe, he could "læggi fram slikt er hann uil oc sanne með eiði sinum" (pay what he wants and prove with his oath) (*Den ældre Frostathings-Lov* 1846, ch. 2:18).

By the time of the enactment of the *Frostaþingslög*, then, the use of the *einseiðr* had been expanded from small property disputes to cases which had a spiritual or ecclesiastical dimension, suggesting that the Church played an important role in popularizing oaths of denial sworn without oath-helpers. Here, we also see the first signs of the *einseiðr* being used as proof of intent, for example when

defendants needed to prove that they were not aware of a feast day, or that they were not aware that they had sworn falsely when they supported a legal claimant as oath-helpers (*Den ældre Frostathings-Lov* 1846, ch. 2:28). Using the *einseiðr* to prove inner mental states in this way would become an important feature of how this oath was applied after the enactment of the *Landslög* in 1274.

The *Landslög* and Intent

Like the provincial laws which it supplanted, the *Landslög* applies the *einseiðr* to economic disputes of low value (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 7:12, 18, 8:12). Where the *Landslög* departs from the earlier laws is in the systematic use of the *einseiðr* in those instances in which the case rested on knowledge that is in some way exclusive to the defendant, which we saw the beginning of in the church law of the *Frostaþing*. A rule which is new to the *Landslög* holds that an indebted man who has no property can swear the *einseiðr* to prove that he shall pay his creditor as soon as God gives him the opportunity (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 8:5). Debt is also the issue in the rule dealing with circumstances where a person has died and his or her heir faces a claim from the deceased's creditor. The *Landslög* adopts the rule from the *Gulaþingslög* (*Den ældre Gulathings-Lov* 1846, ch. 38) which says that if an heir is to deny such a debt, he or she must deny knowledge of it, so as not to swear on the dead's behalf, "En erfingi skal þenna eið sueria (. . .) at eigi uar su skulld sua at ek uissa. þa uinnr hann firir sitt briost en eigi hins dauða" (but the heir (. . .) shall swear that he did not know about the debt. Then he swears for his own chest, and not on behalf of the deceased) (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 8:6). We see a similar concern for what knowledge the *einseiðr* should reflect in cases having to do with damage to property caused by animals. When a mare was killed by a stallion or a dog bit livestock (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, chs. 7:35, 38), the owners of these animals could use the *einseiðr* to deny any knowledge, and therefore any culpability, of the damage done. The rules specify that the oath-taker should swear only to his or her own conscience (*samvíska*), in the first case, and his or her knowledge (*vitend*), in the latter. In both cases, then, the oath-taker seems to be swearing only to the content of his or her own internal mental state.

We find a similar example in a rule dealing with the sheltering of outlaws, and specifically those outlawed for killing at an assembly. Doing so would lead to outlawry, which normally would imply that the *tylftareiðr*, the oath of twelve, sworn with eleven oath-helpers, was necessary to deny the accusation. However, the *einseiðr* could be used to prove that the defendant did not shelter the outlaw willingly (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 4:8) – that he was a *úvísavargr*, the technical

term used in medieval Norwegian law for those who were unaware of the specific circumstances which made their actions illegal (Hertzberg 1895, 680). Thus, we see that the *einseiðr*, the purgation oath which was easiest to swear, could substitute for the largest and most complicated purgation oath when the matter to be decided concerned the defendant's intent.

Inspiration from Theology and Canon Law

What, then, inspired this growing emphasis on intent and individual agency in legal procedure? Around the turn of the twelfth century, the bishop and theologian Anselm of Canterbury introduced a distinction between intentional and unintentional sin, and this theological innovation was quickly adopted and developed in European monastic and cathedral schools (Le Goff 1981, 213–4). The consequences of this new way of thinking were far reaching, according to Jacques Le Goff, "[h]enceforth, all spiritual and moral life centered on the search for intentions, on the examination of what was voluntary and what was involuntary" (Le Goff 1981, 214). It was the content of the mind, then, which now determined the severity of sin, and given that only the individual (as well as God) could know the content of their own mind, individuals now became responsible and accountable for their own sin in a way which had tangible and practical consequences. Not long after the popularization of Anselm's distinction between voluntary and involuntary sin, yearly confessions were made mandatory by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. In the same period, we see a shift away from the public penances practiced in the early Middle Ages and towards more private penances. The practices were more or less the same; alms, fasting, pilgrimage, and so on, but they were no longer carried out in the view of the congregation (Arnold 2001, 61). The individual, then, was increasingly personally responsible for knowing and making amends for its own sins.

We see this emphasis on intention in the canon law of oath-taking as well. Swearing on objects, or *per creaturas*, was prohibited by the laws of the Church, which makes sense when we know that oaths were most likely sworn on things like weapons and rings in Viking Age Scandinavia (Riisøy 2016). However, canonists also argued that oaths could be sworn on objects if the intention of the oath-taker was to swear on that object as a reflection of the glory of God's creation. The example used by the jurists was the moon; swearing on the moon simply as an object was sinful, but swearing on it as a reflection of God was permissible (Helmholz 1996). This distinction between oaths *per creaturas* and what was called oath *per lunam* (by the moon), emphasizes the oath-takers

internal mental state, their intention. According to the canonists, then, the content of the mind was crucial in determining whether an oath was just.

When we take ideas of church theologians and jurists into account, the growing use of the *einseiðr* begins to make more sense. In an intellectual climate which emphasized individual intentions and individual responsibility, it made sense to have a legal proof which made the individual solely accountable for proving legal violations. It is striking that many of the offences to which the *einseiðr* is applied, especially in the *Frostaþingslög*, are legal violations which do not necessarily have a victim, but primarily puts the offending individual's salvation at risk. Working on holy days and not coming to mass are good examples. In these cases, then, it was not necessary to involve oath-helpers because the matter in question was a matter primarily of individual sin, for which the individual was primarily responsible.

The growing prominence of the *einseiðr* could also have been inspired more directly by the procedure which was used in canon law. We find a striking indication of this at the beginning of the *Landslög*, where the law deals with the cases in which it is proven that the winner of a lawsuit has carried out the litigation in some way which was not proper. How is not specified, but we might imagine transgressions ranging from procedural errors to false testimony. In these cases, the defendant – that is, the original winner of a lawsuit – had to pay a fine and the case had to be tried again. Alternatively, he could swear the *einseiðr* to prove "at hann hugðizt eptir retto male sǫkia" (that he believed that his lawsuit was just) (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 1:6). There are clearly similarities between this oath and the calumny oath known from both Roman and canonical procedure. The point of the calumny oath was that the parties in a dispute would swear that they thought their case to be just, and that they would pursue it in an honest way (Helmholz 1996, 153–4). The major difference with the oath we find in the *Landslög* is that the calumny oath was supposed to be sworn prior to the trial, while this specific *einseiðr* is instead the result of a trial gone wrong. That said, as the rule is not found in the provincial laws, it does not seem unlikely that the compilers of the *Landslög* took inspiration from Romano-canonical procedure when designing this rule.

It is not difficult to imagine how ideas from both theology and canon law influenced the Norwegian procedural system. If this new way of using the *einseiðr* was in fact inspired by canon law, as well as theology concerned with individual intent, it makes sense that we see the first traces of it in the church law, because the educated ecclesiastical elite, who had at least some influence on the church law, would arguably have been more in touch with the development in learned law than the lay aristocracy or society at large. We know that Norwegian prelates were knowledgeable about canon law, and by extension Roman law, and it is

likely that this knowledge would have shaped the regulation of the *einseiðr*. One of the first archbishops of Nidaros, Eysteinn Erlendson (d. 1188), was educated at the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris where Anselm's teachings about intentional sin had been very influential (Le Goff 1981, 214). Eysteinn was also intimately familiar with canon law, and most likely heavily involved in revisions to the church law of Trøndelag, carried out in the mid-twelfth century (Gunnes 1996, 131–6; Landau 2011; Winroth 2011; Duggan 2011). It is therefore tempting to speculate as to whether the new and expanded use of the *einseiðr* began with Archbishop Eysteinn, or at least in the intellectual milieu surrounding him.

As for the *Landslög*, we know that many of King Magnús VI's advisors, who were instrumental in shaping the law, probably had in-depth knowledge of canon law in particular (Vadum 2015, 105–6). The saga about the Icelandic bishop Árni Þorlákssson records that the king's chancellor, Þórir Hákonarson, knew church law very well (*Árna saga biskups* 1998, 35). We also know that Bjarni Loðinsson, who was the chancellor of Magnús VI's son and successor Eiríkr II, in fact possessed a doctorate in Roman law from the University of Bologna and is styled as *iuris civilis professor* in a peace accord between the Danish and Norwegian kings (Sällström 1957, 234). The Norwegian elite at the time of the *Landslög* would therefore have been knowledgeable about the legal developments taking place on the European continent during the High Middle Ages. They would have been aware of the calumny oath and its role in canon law as an oath sworn without oath-helpers as proof of the parties' good faith. We can further speculate that they would have seen the parallels between the calumny oath and the oaths used as proof in their native legal system.

The Tension between Perjury and Intention

The parallels between the *einseiðr* and the calumny oath do not answer the central question of why an oath sworn without oath-helpers was considered useful. Why, that is, would the legislative elite of the late-thirteenth century consider the calumny oath a worthwhile source of inspiration in the first place?

To answer this question, we should note that two of the greatest concerns underlying the legal reforms in the *Landslög* were, first, a new emphasis on intention as a factor of relevance in legal questions, and second, an effort to limit the risk of perjury. While intention had been an element in the earlier provincial laws as well, the concept reached much greater prominence in the *Landslög*, and

the way in which this law book treats intention suggests that its legal meaning had to be thoroughly explained:

> Uaða uerk eru með skynsemd greinande. með huerium hætte er þau kunnu til falla. þui at i allum stoðum. þeim sem menn skolu ser til þarfuenda vinna eða monnum til þarfligra luta lið at ueita. þa eru þesse uaða uerk meir uirðande en hin er engi nauðsyn drægr til nema galǫysi oc mikit stamsyni. (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 4:13)

> [It should be carefully explained how accidental harm can occur. Because when people do something necessary, or help others do useful things, then accidental harm should be judged more mildly than if it is not caused by necessary circumstances, but by carelessness and foolishness.] (My translation)

The chapter establishes that when people are hurt in useful endeavours – for example, when a man is killed by accident while chopping wood with another – this was to be punished more leniently than when a man is killed due to some frivolous action, like throwing a spear over a roof (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 4:13). The central points, then, are first of all that the rule treats accidental harm as its own distinct legal category, which was not the case in the earlier provincial laws, and second that it distinguishes between different kinds of accidental harm, in accordance with precepts of Roman and canon law (Sunde 2005, 151–2). It is also striking that the rule is so methodical, in a law book which so often treats matters with extreme brevity; intention is introduced and described with detailed examples and counter-examples which clearly suggest that the law is dealing with something new or otherwise not inherently obvious to its readers.

At the same time, the *Landslög* sought to limit perjury. This is apparent in most of the changes to judicial oath-taking which occur between the provincial laws and the new law book. For example, the *Landslög* demands that oaths be sworn with a much greater proportion of oath-helpers the defendant could not pick freely and who had knowledge about the case they were swearing to, thus making it more difficult for the defendant to seduce the oath-helpers into a false oath (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 9:13). The reason for this anxiety about perjury must have been both spiritual and political, as we can glean from other sources. St. Augustine, arguably one of the most influential thinkers during the Middle Ages, wrote that, "Swearing is a narrow ledge, perjury a precipice" (Augustine 1992, serm. 180.184). The risk of swearing falsely, and thereby falling off the edge into eternal damnation, was ever-present. The *Norwegian Book of Homilies*, a collection of sermons in Old Norse from the end of the twelfth-century, echoes this sentiment and calls perjury one of the "main sins" (*hofuðsyndir*) (Indrebø 1966, 35). Furthermore, the treatise on morality and good governance from the middle of the thirteenth century called the *King's Mirror* (*Konungs skuggsjá*) sees perjury as a symptom of political division and weak

kingship. Once there was more than one king, writes the anonymous author, the realm would be divided, and petty kings would protect criminals from punishment by swearing and testifying falsely on their behalf (*Konungs skuggsjá* 1945, 53).

These two considerations, intention and perjury, together made it useful to apply the *einseiðr* in a new and unprecedented way. Alan Watson has argued in his account of the medieval reception of Roman law that:

> systems of customary law are peculiarly susceptible to this type of borrowing from elsewhere precisely because they are notoriously lacking in precision and clarity, when a need for a rule arises it may not be found or easily found in what the people do.
>
> (Watson 1985, 75)

If Watson is correct, we should expect the transplants into Norwegian medieval law to appear in places where the borrowing served some new function which the legislative elite (in this case, primarily Magnús VI and his advisors) thought to be useful or necessary. The dramatically expanded role of the *einseiðr* might be an expression of precisely this dynamic. When the new law introduced a much greater emphasis on intention, there would also have to be a corresponding legal mechanism which could prove intention. Given that the compilers of the *Landslög* were also concerned with the spiritual and political threat of perjury, and that they explicitly prohibited oath-helpers from swearing to that about which they had no knowledge, a mode of proof was necessary which was intimately tied to the individual, and specifically the individual's knowledge and internal mental state. In this situation, the calumny oath, a mechanism used to access the litigant's intention and good will, could have seemed useful. Furthermore, transferring it would have been easy, as an oath sworn by one of the parties alone was already part of the Norwegian procedural system, as proof in small-scale property disputes. Thus, we can imagine that, inspired by the function of the calumny oath, the compilers of the *Landslög* expanded the role of the *einseiðr* considerably in order to serve a new function which had not really motivated any earlier procedural laws.

The Problem with the *Einseiðr* as Proof of Intent

In the aforementioned rule in the *Landslög* dealing with intention, we saw that the law established that bodily harm would be treated in a distinct way if it were unintentional and useful – for example, if a man killed another with his axe while they were out in a forest chopping wood. The problem is that this rule firmly establishes what it would take to prove that such manslaughter was unintentional, and it is not an *einseiðr* but the *séttareiðr*, the oath sworn with

five oath-helpers. Thus, it seems difficult to sustain the idea that the *einseiðr* was expanded for the purpose of serving as proof in cases dealing with intention when the very rule that introduces intention as an important legal concept does not demand the *einseiðr* as proof.

Yet this is not an insurmountable problem. Note that the rule in question deals with killing, and that it grants a defendant charged with a killing the opportunity to deny his or her intention to kill. This was, of course, an extremely serious matter. The rule is not clear at all on the question of what would happen if the defendant did not swear the oath, or failed in doing so, but it seems likely that, in these cases, a fatal accident would then be considered a homicide, and the perpetrator would have to pay not only full compensation to the victim's heir but also the fine to the king which compensated him for the loss of a subject (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 4:2). It is also worth pointing out that, while all the medieval Norwegian legal texts apply the single purgation oath liberally to disputes over property, family, and spiritual matters, it is never applied to violence, with such rigor that it makes sense to interpret the trend as a principle. In this light, the rules in the provincial laws on infanticide discussed above are also particularly interesting. The *Gulaþingslög* calls infanticide *morð*, or murder (its technical meaning is concealed homicide), thus clearly construing it as a violent crime, but we do not find this framework applied to the exposure of infants in the *Frostaþingslög*. Where a transgression is clearly and explicitly coded as violent, then, many oath-helpers are necessary to deny the accusation. When no such coding is present, the *einseiðr* is acceptable as proof.

Additionally, there was an element of royal financial interest which also came into conflict with the high-minded ideals of the legal reforms. The crown was entitled to fines only when the harm caused was intentional (*Nyere Lands-Lov* 1848, ch. 4:13) – fines which, in cases of homicide, were substantial – and thus it was not in the crown's interest to make it easy for a defendant to escape a charge of intentional homicide. Fines were perhaps the most important source of royal revenue in the late-thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Kåre Lunden argues that the crown's income from fines was at least the size of its income from taxes, and probably much larger (Lunden 1976, 305–6, 309). It would therefore appear that, when regulating the legal distinction between intentional and unintentional bodily harm and applying the mode of proof used to establish this distinction, established custom and royal interests played off of one another. Despite their learned influences, King Magnús and his advisors simply could not permit the *einseiðr* to be used to prove a lack of intention in cases of killing or serious injury, even though this would be more in keeping with the principle used to apply the *einseiðr* elsewhere. Doing so would not

only go against the norms which lay at the very foundation of the legal system but also put the crown's income from fines in peril.

The *Einseiðr* and the Medieval Self

So far, I have showed that the *einseiðr* was first used as a flexible and relatively spontaneous mode of proof in property disputes with small values at stake. It also appears that it was first used specifically to deny debt, as in the *Gulaþingslög*, before being applied to low-value property disputes more generally in the later law books.

Towards the middle of the thirteenth century, legislators learned in canon law gave the *einseiðr* a new role. We see the beginnings of this development in the *Frostaþingslög*, where the oath was by far the most common mode of proof in the section of the law dealing with the Church and spiritual matters. Here, the *einseiðr* is used to settle not only small disputes but also serious transgressions and matters of considerable social significance, such as infanticide, marriage, and perjury.

In the *Landslög*, the *einseiðr* was used not only in small-scale property disputes, as in the provincial laws, but also, and more importantly, to prove a defendant's intention – for example, his or her ignorance of a guest's outlaw status or claim that a case had been brought in good faith. The crown's growing interest in intention as a means of legal differentiation, coupled with its fear of perjury, made the *einseiðr* useful. As in the property disputes, the application of the *einseiðr* to cases resting on intention is pragmatic, but it is pragmatism in service of ideological, religious, and legal principles rather than procedural expediency. However, we have also seen that there were limits to how far these principles could go. It was clearly out of the question that a defendant could use the *einseiðr* to prove intention in cases of homicide or bodily harm, when large fines to the crown were at stake.

At the outset of this chapter, I set out to deconstruct a dichotomy often found in the traditional historiography of medieval individualism, namely, between individualism as political and legal rights, in the vein of Walter Ullman, and individualism as self-expression, in the vein of Colin Morris. The regulation of the *einseiðr* does not seem to fall comfortably into either of these categories. Intuitively, any study which uses normative legal texts as its main sources must concern itself to some extent with the legal and political aspect of individualism. This is after all a lot of what a legal text deals with, who has the right to what? When the issue at hand is the growing prominence of the *einseiðr*, we are also indeed dealing with a question of rights, at least in part, the right of the individual to settle a case by swearing an oath without the support of oath-helpers. In this light, it is possible to

see the development of oath-taking in thirteenth-century Norway as expressing a growing, if still marginal, legal and political individualism.

That said, thinking about the self's role in the *einseiðr* solely from the perspective of rights is not enough. In doing so, we ignore the fact that a premise for the expanded rights of individuals to swear oaths is the idea that the knowledge of individuals is important and valuable. The laws assume that individuals have knowledge about themselves, and that they are able to express this knowledge in a way which is relevant and useful in a legal procedure. Such an idea seems much more in line with the "freedom of man to declare himself," proposed by Colin Morris, than with individualism as an expression of political rights. Swearing a purgation oath without oath-helpers is clearly a kind of individual right, but only in the context of an understanding of the individual as self-aware, and as able to express that self-awareness in a structured way. As such, my analysis has shown that the individual's place in society is not easily, or perhaps even productively, divided into categories which adhere to the taxonomy of modern scholarship. If we are to understand how the role of the individual changes in medieval Norwegian law, and in medieval Europe in general, we must assume that this change manifests on multiple levels, simultaneously and in relation to each other. Self-awareness and rights seem to go together, at once dependent upon and playing off of one another.

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The Agency of Children in Nordic Medieval Hagiography

Abstract: Drawing upon medieval Nordic hagiographic sources, this article seeks to investigate traces of some of the more elusive medieval selves, those of medieval children. The question asked is what insights medieval Nordic saints' lives and miracle collections can offer into medieval children's agency and conceptions of self. We have to consider that these narratives are shaped by their authors, based on their recollected childhoods and encounters with children. Still, the analysis of the Nordic hagiographic corpus provides access to conceptions held about children by members of medieval Nordic societies; to the observed actions of medieval children and traces of their lived experiences; as well as to remembered childhood selves and echoes of children's voices and agency.

Keywords: childhood history, Nordic child miraculees, medieval children's agency, Nordic hagiography, childhood of Nordic saints

In the introduction to this anthology the editors ask: "What aspects of the medieval self are 'visible' and 'investigable' for us?" This chapter investigates traces of some of the more elusive medieval selves, that is, those of medieval children. They are certainly not the individuals that are easiest to find in medieval sources, nor are they the ones traditionally given the most attention from historians. Yet, they are far from invisible or unrepresented.

In the medieval Nordic hagiographic sources this chapter draws upon, it seems obvious and indisputable that medieval children were seen and heard, and that information about their lives and experiences was recorded.[1] The story quoted below is a typical example. It represents one of 14 healing miracles from the A-legend of St Niels of Århus, *De Vita et Miraculis B. Nicholai Arusiensis*. The last one is dated to 1252, and the collection was most likely produced in

1 There has been a debate spanning several decades about the medieval conceptions of children and childhood and what kind of impact the high mortality rates had on these conceptions. This debate will not be engaged with here. For an overview of the discussion, see (Hanawalt 2002).

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connection with an effort by the Århus church to seek papal recognition of the saint (Olrik 1893, 293–4; Krötzl 1994, 70–3).

The miracle in question here will serve as point of departure for an investigation that aims at answering the following research question: What glimpses of medieval children's agency can Nordic hagiographies from the Middle Ages offer, and what can they say about conceptions of self? The story features a newly healed child going back and forth multiple times, offering oblations in the form of water from the saint's sacred spring:

> A man had a son who from birth had been a cripple. He carried him to the grave of Saint Niels, and when the boy awoke after a deep sleep his tendons had relaxed and he was healed. When the father heard this, he did not believe it, until the boy, in everyone´s presence, walked on his own, nine times, from the spring to the tomb and with his own hands that same number of times presented his offerings to Saint Niels.
>
> [My translation, based on Gertz (1908) and Olrik (1893)]

There is something about this image of a boy performing repeated offerings of water to the shrine that is immediately recognizable as childlike. A similar expression of repetitive ritual behavior can be found in the vitae of Catherine of Siena. Her confessor, and the author of her vita, Raymond of Capua, tells the reader that she had confessed to him, on several occasions, that from the age of five she would kneel on each step and recite the Ave Maria when going up and down the stairs in her home (*AASS*, BHL 1702). Shulamith Shahar interprets this as typical childhood behavior, and not a topos (Shahar 1990, 106). The actions of the boy who is said to be healed by St Niels can be interpreted in a similar way, that is, as an expression of the scribe's familiarity with age-typical conduct. On the other hand, to understand this kind of rendered child activity only or predominantly as an expression of what was deemed typical may be too a simplistic reading. It is pertinent to ask what the scribe's reason for including such descriptions might have been. He would perhaps be more interested in describing a child's devotional activity, rather than showcasing his own knowledge of childhood behavior? After all, one of the principal intended functions of the miracles was to read them aloud in order to inspire conversion, strengthen faith, and turn sinners to penance (Goodich 2007, 32; Ward 1987, 30–1).

The sources examined here are not uncritically taken to be accurate depictions of either actual events or children's actual lives. In religious writings, children were used as rhetorical tools to remind adults of their responsibilities (Rudolf 2018), and to evoke emotional responses in adults (Bailey 2017, 268–9). It is necessary to keep in mind that the textual representations of children found in miracle collections and vitae are based on or influenced by the memories and observations of a select group of adults, and that the personal accounts of childhood

events that exist were given after the individuals themselves had become remembering adults. Nevertheless, I am inclined to agree with James Shultz (1995). In his own study of children in medieval German literature, he claims that if we refuse to speculate on what the lives of medieval children were like out of methodological squeamishness, we will be left knowing nothing about them at all (Schultz 1995, 263). This view is also supported by recent studies in childhood history and the methodological advances they have made when it comes to ways in which historical children can be approached (Aasgaard 2017). Of special interest in this context are recent attempts to shift the perspective from one that focuses on adults and their relationships with or conceptions of historical children and childhood to one that centers the agency of children themselves (Müller 2018, 7–13; Laes and Vuolanto 2017). Looking for historical children's agency and lived experience allows questions to be asked about what the children did, actively and maybe intentionally, and how they acted within their own societies.

In childhood history, it is often the careful accumulation of morsels of information that aggregate to supply valuable insights into both the conceptions held about children and childhood and the lived experiences of the children themselves. This is also the case when looking for traces of children's agency and expressions of self through echoes of their voices and actions in Nordic hagiography from the Middle Ages. Texts like the one quoted above as a point of departure yield themselves to accumulative close readings that produce information about the scribes' conceptions of childhood and child behavior. However, since the texts feature reflections of children's actions and voices, they may also give new insights into the agency and lived experiences of the children themselves.

Before focusing on my main question, it is necessary to present the sources and to underscore the conceptions of child and childhood that they present. Through close readings of first actions and then voices of children presented in these sources, I will then go on to discuss the glimpses of child agency that Nordic hagiographies from the Middle Ages can offer, and the access these glimpses give to different aspects of the lived experience and behavior of the elusive selves of medieval children.

Children in Nordic Hagiographic Texts

Miracles can be found in several types of texts, first and foremost in miracle collections, but also in other hagiographic genres like saints' lives, offices for saints, and sermons. In the Nordic context, they may in addition be represented

in sagas and skaldic poetry. Moreover, miracle collections came in numerous forms. Sometimes they were collected in separate miracle books or appended to the lives of saints; oftentimes they were recorded in shrine books, of which there was often only one single exemplar; and sometimes they were collected in preparation for formal canonization processes (Bartlett 2013, 558–64, 576).

The manuscripts that gathered the recorded miracles of Nordic saints were predominantly produced in the twelfth to the fifteenth century, and they were generally written in Latin. Some collections, like the miracles of King Erik of Sweden, were translated into the vernacular in the Middle Ages. The Icelandic miracles are predominantly preserved only in the vernacular, although many of the hagiographic texts, such as the lives of Jón and Þorlákr (Wolf 2008, 248–9; Cormack 2001, 596), were initially composed in Latin. Some of the Nordic miracle collections have several manuscript witnesses, with varying degrees of variance. The *Passio et miracula beati Olaui* is an example of a miracle collection with a more complex manuscript history (Jiroušková 2010, 223–32; 2014), while other collections, such as the miracles of Nils of Linköping, *De miraculis S Nikolai*, are extant in a single manuscript witness (Schück 1895).

In these miracle collections taken together, there are around 250 miracles that feature child and adolescent *miraculés*. A more exact figure is difficult to give for several reasons, above all due to inconsistent definitions and conceptions of childhood. The terms *puer* or *puella* may, for instance, be used about adults, carrying reference to status rather than years of age (Bailey 2013, 202). Some miracle stories deal with adults who are healed from conditions suffered in childhood, and some of these stories also contain significant childhood narratives. Lastly, there are miracle stories where the *miraculé* is not a child, but where children appear in roles as secondary characters. Concerning saints, some of the vitae of the roughly 50 saints associated with the Nordic countries (DuBois 2008, 15–9) have no account of the saint's childhood. More commonly, there are brief, and often rather formulaic, childhood narratives. The vitae of a few saints, such as Birgitta of Vadstena, have more developed childhood accounts.

The children portrayed in the lives of saints are future adults who not only represent themselves as children but also as a portent of what they will be when they grow up; they are, in short, aspiring saints, full of holy potential and future sainthoods. It has been argued that hagiographers, especially in the later Middle Ages, used narratives about the childhood and adolescence of saints deliberately to frame the saint's story and to set the scene for their future holiness. (Hill 2018, 161; McCreesh 2008, 121; Vauchez 1997, 508–10). It is, however, both interesting and important to note that such representation of future potential is not something found exclusively in the lives of saints. The same traits, such as the *puer senex* motif, have been pointed out in conjunction with saga literature,

where children may also be portrayed to represent themselves as adults, and where childhood narratives may function as an introduction to their future adult selves (Ármann Jakobsson 2017, 295–8).

The child *miraculés* from miracle collections can be understood as more ordinary children, encountered under extraordinary circumstances. Apart from stories where an individual that experienced a miracle as child is interviewed as an adult in connection with later canonization hearings, they do not figure as adults in the texts. They are presented as children, encountered in different environments, and portrayed as participating in a range of devotional and everyday activities. The miracles they undergo can be divided into two main groups, often employed as analytical categories in scholarship (Katajala-Peltomaa and Krötzl 2018, 8). Miracles that transpire at the location of the shrine after a pilgrimage of prayer are often termed *shrine miracles*, and miracles that transpire at a distance from the shrine after the invocation of a saint, but with no direct contact with the saint's relics or tomb, are usually termed *distance* or *invocation miracles* (Krötzl 2018, 159–63).

Children who figure as secondary characters, in the lives of saints and in miracle stories, resemble the child *miraculés* in that they, too, are ordinary children. Examples are children who are the beneficiaries of miracles of provision, such as the children whose mother is able to feed them after St Niels of Århus saves her cow (*De Vita et Miraculis B. Nicholai Arusiensis* 1908, 400), or the starving children who are fed after St Þorlákr aids their mother in finding a seal on the beach (*Saga Þorláks Biskups, hin elzta* 1858, 122). Primarily, children in secondary roles are siblings, like the brothers who go with their mobility impaired sibling to the shrine of St Olav in Nidaros (Jiroušková 2014, 75), or playmates. In the latter case, they sometimes play a part in getting help for a child who has been in an accident, as is the case with the children who run to alert the mother of a four-year-old boy who has drowned during play near a river (*Sancti Willelmi Abbatis vita et miracula* 1908–1912, 368–9). Playmates may also feature as part of miracle narratives that focus on the child´s healed body and exemplify the restored body's functionality by describing the child's movement, for example, in play. One example is a group of boys playing together with the newly revived Gunmundus on the day of his drowning and revival (Gallén 1937, 35).

The inclusion of children as secondary characters is rather rare in Nordic Latin hagiography, but there appears to be a difference in frequency between the hagiography of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, and the Icelandic Bishops' sagas and miracles. The latter seem to feature children somewhat more frequently. Several children are fostered by the bishops themselves, and the miracles contain ample circumstantial mention of children as a natural part of the environment, even when they are not the main beneficiary of the miracles. These children

sometimes also act as helpers and messengers, like a girl who is sent to look for a missing woman (*Jóns biskups saga, hin elzta* 1858, 189), or the girl who conveys a message from St Þorlákr about his inability to help everyone who asks for his aid (*Jóns biskups saga, hin elzta* 1858, 179–80).

Clearly, there are no texts in my selection written by children themselves, nor are there many instances where the children's own views or words seemingly are being cited or commented on. In addition, the texts are written not only by, but also primarily for, adults. As a consequence, even when the beneficiary of a miracle in a certain tale is a child, it is not necessarily the child's emotions or actions that are foregrounded, but rather those of the adults around it. Subsequently, when the author of the text presents the testimony of his informants, the children are rarely the ones given a voice by the scribe. It is far more common that an adult will speak, witness, or testify on behalf of the child. Moreover, the rare accounts of children who give witness in canonical hearings (Kuuliala 2013, 244) have also been recorded and filtered through the pens and minds of clerics and scribes. Consequently, what can be most readily observed in these sources is not the self-perception of children, but rather how a certain, limited group of adults viewed children and their actions.

The medieval hagiographic sources were written by celibate churchmen. When working with hagiographic texts, this biased selection of medieval views is a problem that must be acknowledged. However, the texts are not conveying the scribe's or author's views or experiences alone; they were the product of a discourse where the *miraculées*, the hagiographers, and the cultic community participated in producing narratives that can be read as a community's consensus memory (Craig 2009, 87–90). Furthermore, these miracle tales, through retelling, dissemination, and inspiration, also became prescriptive, prompting new pilgrims to undertake similar actions, as those of prior successful miracle seekers presumably shaping their conceptions of devotion and pilgrimage, and thereby also their ideas of children as devotional agents.

Conceptions of Children

One of the primary identifying qualities of children is that they are individuals who are not adults, they are other, and perhaps even less, than the quintessential medieval human, that is, the adult male. However, the distinction between child and adult found in hagiographic texts from the Nordic Middle Ages demonstrates that this is not a matter of a simple binary pair, child versus adult. The words used to describe the ages of a child, as well as when, and to whom, adult status is bestowed, is a more complex matter.

Medieval life cycle definitions most commonly operate with two stages of childhood with a flexible boundary between them, *infantia* (infancy) and *pueritia* (childhood), usually ending at the age of fourteen or fifteen (Cochelin 2013, 8–13). When working with issues related to medieval children, it is common to cite either theories of ages of men (Youngs 2006, 18–23) or legal ideas about ages of discretion or majority as important concepts to comprehend how the medievals themselves understood the ages when the child transitioned into adulthood (Youngs 2006, 96–7). Looking to medieval laws from the Nordic region, it is evident that individuals less than fifteen winters old are considered minors in the *Frostaþinglög* (Larson 2008, 272). But such formal ideas about age do not necessarily reflect the social practices regarding entry into adulthood, echoed in hagiographical sources where reality and the use of age-related terms sometimes seem to be less clear cut. This is especially true regarding the life stage known as *adolescentia*, a stage recognized by medieval society as an age between childhood and full adulthood, especially regarding males, ranging from early teens and sometimes as far as into the thirties, where the boy or young man had not taken on full maturity (Karras 2003, 13–5, 159). In the Nordic miracles, there is a certain fluidity in the use of age-related terms. There are 10-year-olds called youths, such as one boy in the miracles of Catherine of Vadstena (*AASS*, BHL 1713), and 4-year-olds called infants (*Vita sancti Brynolphi* 1876, 144).

Furthermore, there are unmarried women, especially disabled ones, who are called girls and are given limited autonomy far into adulthood. In addition to this flexible use of age-related terms, there are also examples indicating that conceptions of children and childhood are defined by relations of power as well as chronological age. The men who wrote these tales still demonstrate an understanding of the limitations and capabilities of children of different ages. Sometimes this is explicitly stated, for instance in a miracle from St Nils of Linköping from the first quarter of the fifteenth century, where a future pilgrimage of thanksgiving from Odensvi to Linköping, about 80 km, is promised on behalf of a half-year-old boy. The pilgrimage is stated to happen when the child is old enough to sit on top of a horse (Schück 1895, 378).

An example of the use of age-related terms with regards to adolescent girls can be seen when comparing two miracle accounts in the miracles of Nils of Linköping (Schück 1895, 355–66, 386). The first is a miracle story about Botildis who gives birth to conjoined twins, and the second is about Ramborghis who becomes ill with a serious illness. On Ramborghis' behalf, a vow is made by her father and two other men for her to travel to the shrine barefoot and without linens on, while for Botildis the vow is made by a woman who is helping her give birth. On behalf of both girls, the vows are of pilgrimage, and when they

have recovered, the vows are carried out; Ramborghis traveling with her father and Botildis with her husband.

These two miracles are said to have happened two years apart, they are connected to the same saint, found in the same miracle collection, and readdressed in the canonization process of St Nils of Linköpig. The two girls are said to share the same age (15 years), but regardless of this, one is referred to as wife (*uxor*) and woman (*mulier*) while the other is referred to as *daughter* (*filia*) and *girl* (*puella*). Botildis, who is giving birth, is presented as an adult, and it is reasonable to assume that she herself would share that understanding. Ramborghis, who is ill and traveling with her father, is presented as a girl and daughter. In this context, age seems to be of secondary importance. Ramborghis' story illustrates that some Swedish young women over the age of majority, but still unmarried and living with their parents, did not have the full status of adults. Comparing the two examples thus underscores a point of more general importance: for many girls, the transition from adolescence to adulthood would have been related to marriage (Hanawalt 1995, 12–3).

Children's Actions

As is sometimes pointed out in studies more focused on material culture, children see the world from a different perspective than adults, lower parts of the environment, objects, and persons are within their reach, and they also direct their touch differently (Laurence 2016, 28). Furthermore, children engage with objects and spaces in their own ways, utilizing them for play and games, regardless of how adults would have intended them to be used (Crawford 2018, 21–9). The same considerations can be applied to children encountered in hagiographical literature; at the shrines, in the churches, and in their homes. They must have experienced the spaces mentioned in the texts in a uniquely childlike way, which means that their experience of and movement in the described environment was shaped by their size, vantage point, and individual interests. These perspectives may be helpful to bear in mind when envisioning the children in the environments described in miracle stories.

At the center of every miracle narrative dealing with the sick and their healing, the physical and material human body is found, which is what most miracle narratives revolve around. Children healed at the shrine are usually first encountered in a broken, sick, or disabled state, while children healed at a distant location may also be introduced as healthy, in transit or traveling, at work or in play, whereupon they are struck by sudden illness or become the unfortunate victim

of an accident. Accordingly, the miracle narrative is often framed by two different descriptions of the *miraculé's* bodily condition: first, the dysfunctional, disfigured, or diseased body, then the newly healed and now healthy body, sometimes described as beautiful or visually pleasing, and usually as active and functional. This narratological structure may be said to turn the genre of miracle stories into a treasure trove for descriptions of medieval children's bodies and activities, often showcasing a restored body engaged in sound activities such as playing, running, and eating. The active child is thus emphasized over the silent and invisible one. It represents an ideal, and the miracle stories reveal conceptions of what a healthy child would do and how it would act.

In our narrative point of departure – the story about the boy who repeatedly carries water from the holy spring to the shrine – descriptions of the child's physical condition and actions frame a discernible shift in agency. When the father brings the child to the shrine, the boy is primarily a prop while the father is the agent acting on his behalf. Immediately after the healing, however, the boy himself becomes the acting person at the center of attention. Many miracles feature a similar shift from adult, often parental, agency to child agency. This is especially noticeable in miracles concerning the smallest children, who, in the moment of healing, seem to become not only physically healthy, but also more autonomous agents. Initially, they are carried and presented by an adult; when healed, they gain initiative and act on their own, sometimes playing, sometimes performing devotional acts. In our miracle story, the child, who was brought to the shrine by his father and then fell asleep, becomes the focal agent and center of attention when he is transformed – not only from a mobility impaired to an able-bodied person, but also to an individual who, on his own accord, pursues devotional activities, thereby demonstrating what may be characterized as the somewhat playful religious agency of a medieval child.

Children and adolescents are portrayed in the miracles as performing a broad selection of activities either at the shrine of the saint, on pilgrimage, or away from the shrine, both inside and outside the home. Some of these children are portrayed as religious and devotional agents who may themselves be shown to invoke a saint and call upon her or him for help. One example is a 10-year-old boy called Holmstanus, who, according to the text, invokes St Birgitta to come to his aid when he is stuck on an ice float in the Swedish archipelago (Collijn 1924, 131–2). Another example is a young boy who calls on Bishop Þorlákr when a fire threatens him and other children who are home alone at a farm in the Icelandic West Fjords (*Saga Þorláks Biskups, hin elzta* 1858, 122).

According to Ronald Finucane, the vows of the marginal, the widows, the aged cleric and, most importantly in this instance, the little children (*parvuli*) were deemed especially potent (Finucane 1997, 13). In the Nordic miracles with

child *miraculés*, the question of vows is treated in ways that portray children with varying degrees of responsibility and agency. An interesting example, which illustrates conceptions about ages of majority as well as the agency and responsibility of individuals of different ages, is found in the miracles of St Henricus. Here, a long-term vow of repeated pilgrimage to the saint's shrine in the cathedral in Turku (Åbo) is explicitly said to be handled by the parents until the child has reached the age of discretion. (Heikkilä 2009, 270–2) There are also examples of children who invoke a saint without any appearance of *do ut des*. As seems to be the case with the previously mentioned boy who calls on Bishop Þorlákr when a fire breaks out, the child invokes the saint on its own initiative, not promising anything in return. In these narratives, children who would, under most circumstances, be considered too young to enter into a legally binding contract or make a vow appear to be granted an exemption when they get the saint to intercede on their behalf.

Children's Voices

In hagiography, as in other medieval genres and sources, children's own voices are rarely, if ever, recorded. What can be found are the voices of children mediated, molded, and narrated by adults who, most likely, had limited contact with children. There are many instances of such referenced speech in the miracles recorded in collections and canonization hearings. However, while possible vestiges of children's voices might imply a certain level of closeness to the statements originally made by the witness (Fröjmark 2018), there is no way to ascertain that the instances of direct or reported speech found in the miracle stories are actual renderings of a child's utterances.

In a miracle found in a fourteenth-century collection associated with the shrine of St Erik at Uppsala, the *Vita et Miracula Sancti Erici*, there is an instance of what appears to be a testimony given directly from a former child *miraculé*: "Olavus, from the parish of Huddunge, said of himself that when he was a seven-year-old boy he lost his mind for a year and a half" (Nelson 1944, f 14r, v). The text presents the narrative as Olavus' retelling of his own history, and what is found here is, arguably, an instance of a medieval adult's remembered childhood self. When expressions of self-representations are found in these texts, this is most often the case: they are communicated by an adult who is said to recount an incident that happened in his or her childhood.

In the lives of visionary saints, there are several narratives based on the saint's reminiscences of childhood, and recorded by their confessors (Voaden

and Volf 2000). In the Nordic sources, St Birgitta's childhood narrative is a prominent example. Her five childhood visions are retold in the first part of her vitae, which is written by two of her confessors, found among the acts of her canonization process (Harris 1990, 14–5), and said to have occurred between the age of seven and Birgitta's marriage at fourteen (Collijn 1924: 614–6). Her adult recollections resemble other adult testimony about childhood experience, both removed in time as the remembered childhood-self of an adult witness and shaped by convention and genre. As such, they carry the same potentials and limitations as other hagiographic sources.

Due to increased documentation demands brought about by the development of the formal canonization processes, the *miracula* genre changed in substantial ways during the medieval period. Miracles recorded in the context of canonizations are often characterized by being richer in detail than their earlier, locally recorded counterparts, as they tend to include more information about environmental, social, and circumstantial topics. The resulting texts have been held to represent a type of hagiographic material that is closer to the historical event than previous compilations of miracles (Katajala-Peltomaa 2009, 18–9).

The regulations and the clerical control of the canonization processes shaped the proceedings regarding what questions would be asked (Goodich 2007, 87–94), and who would be interviewed. Gender, wealth, reputation and, most importantly in our context, age of maturity were all selection criteria for witnesses (Katajala-Peltomaa 2018, 227). The interrogated witnesses to the reported miracles were often parents, neighbors, and other persons from the child's local community; sometimes the former child *miraculé* her- or himself was also included among the witnesses. When several witnesses testified to the circumstances and events of a certain miracle, there is sometimes a layering of narratives that produces a more detailed and vivid image of the circumstances discussed and provides more detail about the individual child's lived experience and self-understanding.

According to canon law, children under the age of fourteen were not considered able to take an oath. Consequently, children are rarely encountered as witnesses in canonization hearings (Kuuliala 2013, 244). In the twelfth century, when a large part of canon law was worked out, issues concerning children were also touched upon. The conclusion of the lawmakers was that religious belief only fully matured as the child entered puberty. As a consequence, mortal sin was seen as the domain of adults; a child could not commit the kind of mortal sin that would earn them damnation (Orme 2017, 321). One should also keep in mind that medieval theologians did not regard it necessary for children to give confession, get absolution, or pay penances; only after puberty were children expected to participate in these religious activities (Orme 2017, 320). These beliefs and practices

underscore that children had a different legal and moral status than adults, which is also reflected in the general lack of child witnesses.

All the extant records of canonization hearings in the Nordic region are related to Swedish saints. In these canonization records, there are some young adults who testify to their own recollection of events that are said to have transpired only a few years before. These are former child *miraculés*, who, at the time of the canonization processes, had reached legal maturity, and who testified to the correctness of an article describing his or her miraculous healing. These are not children recounting their experiences from the vantage point of the child, but adult retrospectives on events from childhood and adolescence, drawing on memories of a past childhood self.

In 1417, the Swedish church, with the support of Rome, started canonization proceedings in the case of three saints, Ingrid of Skänninge, Brynolf of Skara, and Nils of Linköping. From the canonization processes of the two male saints the whole proceedings are extant, but in the case of Ingrid of Skänninge only a few fragments exist today. In the miracles of Brynolf of Skara, no former child *miraculés* are recorded as witnesses. In the canonization hearings of Nils of Linköping, four former child or adolescent *miraculés* give testimonies, in addition to the aforementioned Botildis, here 22 years old. The 22-year-old Thomas, 21-year-old Ingefridis, and 26-year-old Ramborghis all testify to the truth of the articles describing the miraculous healings said to have transpired (Lundén 1963, 314, 332, 342–4). In all three miracle texts, it seems clear that they are not afforded adult status at the time of their miracles. Thirteen-year-old Ericus is the youngest individual to testify in this canonization process: this adolescent testifies to the truth of the article concerning his healing at the age of nine (Lundén 1963, 320).

An interesting instance of a former child *miraculé* testifying during a canonization process is found in the sparse extant fragments from the canonization process of Ingrid of Skänninge, conducted in the summer of 1417. The article narrating the event of the boy Gunmundus who drowned in a well and was revived is lost, but three witness testimonies to the events surrounding his drowning and subsequent revival still exist. Among them there is one rare example of a young adult, the then 20-year-old Gunmundus, giving testimony to the events that are said to have happened 16 years earlier. Gunmundus not only attests to the truth of the article according to his own memory, he also testifies that the article describes the events as "fore uera quia sic in se ipso sensit et ab aliis audiuit ueraciter contigisse," that is, as he himself experienced them and as he has been told that they really came to pass (Gallén 1937, 34–5). This retelling of the event by others is clearly stated as a source of knowledge to the young man's dramatic childhood experience. Consequently, Gunmundus, on the one hand, claims to base his approval of the article on his own recollection, and on the

other, on the story that he, most likely, has been told multiple times throughout his childhood. This story is also stated to be publicly known in the entire district.

It is plausible that actions described in the miracles were influenced and shaped by real children. The voices of these children are, however, harder to access. Yet, there are instances where the reported voices of named individuals bring forth remembered childhood selves, and these contribute to a more vivid picture of what may be termed their rhetorical agency.

Concluding Remarks

When new social groups are included, and their history explored, new questions arise, and we are made aware of new perspectives, mechanisms, and ideas. Children's history expands on what is considered the purview of history and historians, and so, traditional assumptions about who counts in history become destabilized (Saxton 2010).

Returning to our narrative point of departure, it might be said that the author of the text presents the reader with a child who acts intentionally. Bringing donations of water from the sacred spring to the shrine, this boy, on the one hand, participates in a well-established religious practice, probably imitating devotional actions he has observed. On the other hand, his repetitive donations add an aspect of childlike invention. What is seen in this story is arguably the reflection of a medieval child's religious agency, here represented by a young boy portrayed as a devotional, religious agent, acting in ways that both conform and break with expected religious activity and devotional practice. I am not disregarding an element of play in this activity, but I am also inclined to interpret it as an expression of religious learning and cognition. The boy's actions can be read as an instance of socially situated learning, in this case involving cognitive processes such as recognizing the intentions of other people, imitation, and inventive incorporation of observed actions into a ritual which is childish in ways demonstrating that a well-established adult practice is not yet fully internalized and mastered.

The children found in the Nordic miracles are in several ways presented as active individuals with agency and autonomy. They initiate and go on pilgrimage; they invoke saints, pray, and give vows on their own behalf; they travel alone or in groups, over long distances as well as locally; they get lost, give aid to each other, and play together or on their own. In this sense, the miracles studied give access to the lived experience and behavior of medieval children in the Nordic region.

Admittedly, the perspectives encountered in medieval hagiographic texts are primarily, if not exclusively, those of adults. However, they are nonetheless influenced by interaction with medieval children (Zottl 2006, 3–4). Medieval adults would draw on memories of their own childhoods when writing their narratives, as former child *miraculés* also did when testifying to their own childhood experiences. Shaped by remembered childhoods and encounters with children living in specific localities in specific times, miracle stories provide access not merely to the scribes' conceptions of children and childhood, or the outward and observed actions of children themselves, but also to traces of medieval children's lived experiences and to echoes of their voices. Taken together, they thus give new insights into conceptions held about children by members of medieval Nordic societies, as well as the agency and selves of medieval children. Reaccentuating the editors' introductory question, it is therefore my claim that hagiographic sources such as the ones studied contribute to making aspects of medieval children both "visible" and "investigable."

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Elise Naumann

Food, Everyday Practice, and the Self in Medieval Oslo: A Study of Identities Based on Dietary Reconstructions from Human Remains

Abstract: The significance of everyday practice, including food-related activities, is becoming increasingly acknowledged in archaeological research. Even so, studies of food and meals are seldom included as an integrated and essential aspect to understand political organization and development. In this article, the complex relation between human agency, the construction of the self, and political organization is discussed with everyday activities related to food as the point of departure. The discussion is based on results from osteological and dietary analyses of human individuals buried in medieval Oslo, enabling a reconstruction of dietary and nutritional development in lived lives. Human experience is considered as part of, and contributor to, societal structure and change in the early medieval town of Oslo.

Keywords: food, everyday practice, medieval Oslo, social memory, human remains, dietary reconstruction, isotope analyses

Introduction – Food and the Self

It is sometimes easy to forget that, beyond the lives of the royal and ecclesiastical elite, medieval towns consisted primarily of ordinary people doing fundamentally ordinary things. Each individual within a town contributed to its structure and development, acting in response to societal circumstances, but also sometimes actively asserting the individual and perceptions of the self – each person acting in line with their personal and communal experiences. How did the self play a role in the structure and development of the town? Drawing on archaeological and osteological sources from the medieval town of Oslo, this article aims to add a piece to this complex puzzle by focusing on that which is most ordinary: food, and the multitude of actions, emotions, and meanings provoked by, connected to, and derived from the relationship between food and the self.

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The significance of food in human culture is well established in anthropological studies (Goody 1982; Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Lupton 1996; Lévi-Strauss 1966; Rozin 1987, 1976). Not only is food essential to survival and health, but the range of social practices connected with food – procurement, storage, preparation, and the meal itself – are deeply rooted in human culture. These practices are important elements in the negotiations that occur between identity, social position, and social organization. Given the repetitive nature of everyday food-related practices and the volume of resources associated with them, food ought to be considered a key factor in studies of human societies in the past.

Although the significance of food has made its way into recent social archaeology research (Hastorf 2017; Hamilakis 2011; Schrader 2019; Bukkemoen 2016), the archaeology of food is seldom a focus of studies of past societies. Instead, food practice is often applied as a separate approach, or given minor attention, as seen in earlier studies of medieval Oslo discussing the urbanization process, political organization and economic development (see for instance Molaug 2008, Helle 2006 and Schia 1991). However, some new scholarship has drawn attention to food strategies and food culture in Oslo through analyses of archaeological, paleo-botanical, and osteological materials (Sture and Bauer 2017; Vedeler 2017; Norseng 2015).

For the population of Oslo, food was undoubtedly integral to most aspects of daily life, related to issues of social interaction, leisure activities, satisfaction, endeavors, and sensory and emotional experiences (taste, smell, hunger, disgust, envy, and desire). Thus, food and its associated roles formed an essential part of the makeup of people's day-to-day routines. The selection of food was determined by cultural and individual preferences, a person's position with the hierarchical structure, as well as availability. Food preparation included a range of tools, equipment, and skills, and the sharing of meals contributed to the formation of different social relations. From dawn to dusk, through the seasons of the year, in the town's narrow streets and open market places, around the home's hearth or table, in the barn, in the field, or at sea, people were involved in different activities centered around food. Through these various pursuits, which evoke emotions and contribute to memory production, food played a central role in the continuous negotiations between society and the self.

This paper investigates the role of food in this interplay between society and the self during the period of early urbanization in medieval Oslo. Current knowledge of food practice in medieval Oslo based on archaeology, literature, and anthropology will be considered together with dietary information derived from the remains of individuals buried in Oslo in the tenth to twelfth centuries. Through an understanding of food as a key factor in identity construction, this paper

hopes to shed light on how practices related to food affected the development of social structures and the construction of personal identity in medieval Oslo.

Food as Identity Marker through Practice and Memory

The construction of identity – here understood as how a person or a group defines themselves and others in relation to other persons or groups – is dynamic by nature, a continuous and fluid process shaped by experience on both a personal and communal level (Meskell 1999, 2001). Identity is multilayered; all people simultaneously have a number of different social identities that shift with different social relations, roles, and experiences. Identity operates on different levels: the broader level is defined by shared perceptions within a society or a group, through social organizations and structures, while a more exclusive and singular level of identity is formed through personal experiences. The latter level is more dynamic, as this form of identity is more exposed to immediate change and influence. These levels are not parallel entities, but are in constant reciprocal negotiation; individual experience and self-perception will affect the construction of group identity, which will at any time define individual identity (Meskell 2001). Because collective, shared identities within a group are more persistent, the commitment to communal identities should be considered in relation to social structures and the distribution of power (Gardner 2011). This dynamic is highly relevant to the discussion below regarding how and why any given person, through shifting and multilayered identities and variable life experiences, is still committed to certain overarching self-perceptions within a life span.

Being both fluid and fixed at the same time, identity is closely related to the production and maintenance of memory. Memory is not a ready-made bank of information from which anything from the past can be withdrawn; instead, it is a dynamic process of selection, modified in response to social organization and life experiences (Jones 2007). Because there is no way of remembering everything, memory construction involves both intentional and unintentional forgetting. Memory, as identity, is formed in different levels of shared and individual experience. The collective reconstruction "of the past in the past" is actively used to shape social memory (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Halbwachs 1992), though memory production also occurs as a result of semi-intentional and unintentional constructions in everyday practice (Cipolla 2008). Memory is created, shaped, maintained, and developed in negotiations between the individual and her interactions with her surroundings, through, for instance, material

culture, written texts, sensory experiences, including smell and taste, or emotional responses to experiences. Especially relevant here is the relationship between memory and identity construction through day-to-day experiences related to food: this relationship will form the backdrop to a discussion of how the self is formed and renegotiated.

Along with many other elements of everyday life, food has long been a neglected focus of research on past societies, perhaps because it seems too ordinary and mundane to warrant much reflection (Hastorf 2017). However, as the groundbreaking works of anthropologists Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) and Mary Douglas (1996) have established, there can be little doubt about the dynamic relation between identity construction and food culture. Food holds a significant position in memory production, activating all five senses at once (Hastorf 2017; Barker 1982). Through taste, smell, sight, sound, and touch, food preparation and consumption constitute an embodied form of memory. Taste is closely related to habit and repetition. Psychologist Paul Rozin (1987) suggests that individual experience is a determining factor for human food preferences – more so than age, gender, and biological variables. Because people tend to prefer familiar foods and are hesitant to try new ones, unfamiliar foods are commonly introduced together with known ones (Rozin 1987). The introduction of new foods can often be seen as a response to biological requirements: people need to consume a varied diet, and in times of shortages, for example, they need to supplement their diet. Rozin refers to the incongruity between the conservative nature of human food preferences and the need to explore new foods as the "omnivore paradox"; this leads to a more diverse diet than is biologically necessary (Rozin 1976). Of course, food selection and taste are also naturally affected by the presence of hierarchical structures and social control. In any hierarchical society, regulating and distributing common goods is an essential part of negotiating and maintaining power (Appadurai 1986).

The actual consumption of edibles is only one part of identity construction in the everyday practices associated with food. A range of activities are involved, including tending fields and gardens, constructing homes and spaces for cooking and eating, caring for animals, making and repairing tools, and participating in market exchanges, and these all contribute to the forming of both communal and individual identities. Each of these activities requires time, knowledge, and an engagement with surrounding resources and people. Tending a garden, for example, first requires a selection of seeds and fertile soil, followed by regular watering, weeding, protecting the produce from potential exploiters and, eventually, harvesting; these actions take place on a regular basis, integrated into everyday practice, and they occur before any actual preparation or consumption of the food. After harvesting, the products would have been distributed –

possibly sold at market, shared between the members of the family, or offered to guests or other persons holding a special claim to the produced food. The preparation of food depends on skills and transferred knowledge, in addition to the handling of a variety of tools and equipment. The meal itself, the by-product of a long chain of actions, would unlikely be the result of a random choice of place, time, and combination of people, but would be a quotidian event imbued with meaning – both reflecting and forming social relations and identities within daily life.

Against this backdrop, this paper will consider the relationship between identity construction and food in everyday practice. Furthermore, this relationship will be examined in connection with the dynamic process forming communal and individual identities. And lastly, these issues will be considered together with the power structures and individual human agency within the medieval town of Oslo.

Fig. 1: Memory and identity construction are produced through day-to-day experiences related to food. For instance, food preparation forms the basis for social relations and interactions as well as the production and transference of knowledge; and these occur together with embodied sensorial and emotional experiences. (Illustration: Hege Vatnaland. Copyright: NIKU).

Food in Medieval Oslo AD 1000–1200

As Christine A. Hastorf (2017) points out, many aspects of past food practices are today lost to us, including cooking aromas, how food was served, or the sounds of conversation and laughter among those sharing a meal. However, substantial amounts of extant material bear witness to past food practices, such as tools for plant cultivation and animal husbandry, cooking and eating equipment and utensils, animal bones, seeds, and shells. In addition, accounts in written sources as well as information embedded in chemical signatures in human bones provide evidence about past food customs of medieval Oslo.

The first signs of early urbanization in Oslo are dated to the first half of the eleventh century (Nordeide and Gulliksen 2007; Molaug 2008), though several farms from earlier periods have been identified in the Oslo region (Holmsen 1963). In general terms, one can say that the establishment of the early medieval towns in Norway concurs with the conversion from paganism to Christianity, though this is obviously a simplified statement; conversion started during the Viking Age and was a long and complicated process (Nordeide and Gulliksen 2007). However, current knowledge of the origins of Oslo is based partly on the oldest Christian graveyard in the area, believed to have been established in the first half of the eleventh century, clearly indicating a Christian burial tradition from the beginning of urban settlement. During the first generation of this expanding town development, the settlers experienced an increase in population, together with a more pronounced royal and ecclesiastical presence. The town's economy seems to have been dependent on supplemental resources from the surrounding agricultural areas (Helle 2006).

Oslo is situated in a rich agricultural region, with arable lands and access to marine sources; additionally, large and small game live in the surrounding woods. Even though a range of foods, from livestock, crops, small and large game, various marine species including fish, fruits, and vegetables were available in Oslo (Sture and Bauer 2017; Hufthammer 2015; Øye 1998; Griffin 1988), both written and archaeological sources indicate that barley and herring dominated the diets of most people (Øye 1998; Dybdahl 2000). Regarding livestock, both archaeological and written sources suggest cattle to be most common (Lie 1979; Hufthammer 2015; Skaar 2014), though remains from sheep and pigs are also regularly found (Hufthammer 2015; Lie 1979). Undoubtedly, though, the different foods available in the town were distributed unequally between people of different social rank (Skaar 2014; Sture and Bauer 2017; Øye 1998).

While there seems to have been a preference for meat in pre-medieval times, abstinence and fasting were parts of an ideal introduced with Christianity (Skaar 2014), with prohibitions against the eating of horse, dog, and cat established,

punishable by law. Purity and redemption were closely associated with an ascetic lifestyle. This ideal, however, may not have been easily accepted and implemented in everyday customs, for a number of laws address restrictions and punishments for meat consumption, which may be evidence of an ongoing struggle between the Church and the community (Skaar 2014). It has been suggested that the introduction of fasting – the banning of meat consumption for more than one hundred days each year – led to an increase in the consumption of fish and shellfish (Skaar 2014). This assumption is particularly interesting in terms of dietary habits in towns, as the first urban settlements have been interpreted as "ports of faith," the first Christian settlements in Norway from which the new religion spread to the rest of the country (Nordeide 2011).

Individual Food Practices in Oslo

Within this general framework regarding food culture and the access to food in the medieval town of Oslo, the inhabitants were at any given time involved in different activities related to food, drawing upon opportunities, knowledge, and individual experience. How was food then incorporated into the daily organization for each person? Even though we can never fully understand this complex picture, we do have access to the human remains of certain individuals who most probably lived, and certainly were buried, within the medieval Oslo urban settlement. And while the information provided by human remains is often very practical in nature, it can nonetheless be employed in attempts to reveal complex patterns of social identity (Pearson and Meskell 2015; Schrader 2019).

Bioarchaeology also allows investigations into the early years of those who survived past their youth; both physical traits and isotopic values in teeth, for instance, may reveal periods of stress, malnutrition, and illness during childhood and early adolescence (Martin, Harrod, and Péres 2013; White, Black, and Folkens 2012). They can also provide information about dietary composition, dietary change, and geographic movement experienced during the time of tooth formation (Sealy, Armstrong, and Schrire 1995; Pollard and Heron 2008). Additionally, isotopic values in bones continuously change and reflect dietary habits during the last phases of life (Sealy, Armstrong, and Schrire 1995), while healed injuries, illness, and trauma experienced earlier in life may leave permanent marks on the bones. Stable isotope values of collagen in human remains provide information about the main protein components in the diet – differentiating between marine and terrestrial foods and between vegetable and animal products (Pollard and Heron 2008; Chisholm, Nelson, and Schwarcz 1982). The values in human tissue thus represent the average values from thousands of

meals, consumed on a daily basis. Samples from different body tissue and teeth offer information from different stages of life – lived experience and embodied memory production throughout a period of changing identity. Food was a significant part of the lives of those buried in Oslo, and the results from the isotopic values offer a window into these lived experiences.

Information regarding the diets and food practices of individuals can significantly contribute to our understanding of past societies – not only what these people ate, but also how they ate, how food distribution and consumption was implemented in everyday life, how political organization defined access to food, how trade, agriculture, and animal husbandry were organized and controlled, and, finally, how family, work, gender, age, or other ethnic identity contributed to defining individual consumption behaviors. Thus, dietary reconstructions actually represent an embodied, and unbiased, human experience that archaeologists can make use of as a means to investigate lives, day-to-day experiences, and the social reality for individuals within the societies we endeavor to understand (Schrader 2019).

In a recent study, 20 individuals buried during the first centuries of urban Oslo were analyzed for stable isotopes (^{13}C and ^{15}N) and strontium, enabling both a dietary reconstruction and a discussion of place of origin for the analysed individuals (Naumann et al. 2019): see Appendix 1 in this article. The stable isotope analyses applied facilitate a general estimation of primary protein sources, distinguishing between land-based plants, animals, and marine species (Naumann et al. 2019). The analyzed pool consisted of 11 women, 7 men, and 2 persons of unknown sex, ranging in age from approximately 13 to +60 at time of death. All 20 were buried in Oslo's earliest known graveyard, in the grounds of St. Clement's Church (Eide 1974), which later possibly functioned as a parish church (Nordeide and Gulliksen 2007; Naumann et al. 2019). The analyzed individuals might therefore represent people who lived within the urban settlement, as well as people who belonged to surrounding farms that were part of the extended urban environment. The sex-determined population buried at St. Clement's is slightly biased towards women (488 females and 414 males) (Holck and Kvaal 2000), suggesting that they are not necessarily demographically representative (Eide 1974). The strontium results from the 20 analyzed individuals indicate that these people were likely from the Oslo region, living within or in connection to the urban center. Most had a varied diet consisting of foods from both land and sea, and all seem to have eaten a certain amount of animal products (though not necessarily meat; the method does not allow for a separation between meat and other products such as milk or eggs) and possibly freshwater fish.

Furthermore, and of special interest to the present article, the lack of change in values suggests that most of the analyzed individuals did not significantly alter their diet throughout their lifetime. As similar isotopic values in humans

might reflect different foods with the same isotopic values, a short discussion of these results seems necessary at this point. The stable isotope analyses performed on the human remains in question represent a fairly general source of information of different food types, and do not separate between, for instance, different animal products such as dairy and meat. This means that a person might well have consumed more meat and fewer dairy products in different stages of life, without any visible change in isotopic values. The same can be stated about a number of different plants and animals that are fundamentally different in terms of availability, value, and taste, but which leave isotopic values in human tissue that are inseparable. In short, for this group, we can conclude that most or all of them consumed a varied diet consisting of fish, terrestrial plants, and probably also terrestrial animals, but based on our current knowledge we are unable to reconstruct dietary components in more detail. The lack of significant change in isotopic values for each person throughout their lifetime might not represent actual dietary consistency, though given the pattern of unchanged isotopic values for most of the individuals in the study, a lack of dietary change seems to be the most plausible explanation, as this finding is unlikely coincidental.

The isotopic results do not reflect any trend of increased marine consumption, either throughout a single individual's lifetime or between generations (Naumann et al. 2019). This is confirmed by dietary results from individuals buried in Oslo in the late-medieval period, suggesting that people consumed the same amount of fish at that time as they did during the first generations of urban settlement (Jensen 2018). These results contrast with findings from a medieval population in Stavanger, which indicate an increase in marine consumption in medieval Stavanger (van der Sluis et al. 2016). The lack of increased marine consumption in the Oslo population suggests that the many fasting days introduced by the Church did not result in any actual decrease in meat consumption – indicating a resistance in the population to following the Christian regulations.

There was certainly variation between individuals – there is disparity in the diets of the 20 people that were analyzed (Naumann et al. 2019) – but each person seems to have consumed more or less the same composition or mix of foods from early childhood up until the time of death. These results contrast sharply with individual dietary variations during the Viking Age in northern Norway, where a change in diet, sometimes radical, over a lifetime seems to have been more common than dietary continuity (Naumann et al. 2014; Naumann, Price, and Richards 2014).

At first glance, the results from Oslo may seem trivial. After all, who would be surprised that people continued to eat the same types of food? But taking a closer look, these data are significant in several ways. First, as this is a definitive trend among the analyzed individuals, the results can hardly be construed

as coincidental. Instead, the lack of dietary change represents a certain, specific trend within medieval Oslo. This trend shows that during a period of urban growth, Christianization, settlement expansion, and a shift in political organization, these inhabitants continued to eat the same types of food. This observation can be further developed, with the implication being that, over time, the population replicated not only their eating habits, but also a number of other activities related to the procurement, production, and preparation of these specific foods. Second, the results are also epistemologically significant. As small children, none of these persons could have prepared the food that they consumed. Others did this work for them, and in doing so, they also took all the necessary steps to ensure that these specific meals were served to this child. Later on, our study population may or may not have been involved in the procurement and preparation of the food for their own meals, but the knowledge involved was certainly carried on from one generation to the next – though still reflecting variations and thus different cuisines within the town. The epistemological dimension extends well beyond cooking skills; as laid out above, a range of different, everyday activities would form the basis for any meal before it reached the table. Third, the continued consumption of food types also implies a continued social situation in relationship to the meals: a re-creation and maintenance of social relations and interactions connected to food preparation and the meal itself. Lastly, it could be argued that a consistent, mixed diet likely reflects what we might expect from ordinary people in medieval Oslo: repeatedly making the same foods, which represent the embodied memory of past meals, and a preferred selection of familiar foods. This last issue leads to a discussion of agency and the level of individual choice, preferences, and an ability to influence a given situation. Demographic studies of health within the urban population based on osteological remains might further support a high level of individual agency: the Oslo population displays a relatively low presence of dietary deficiencies and malnutrition during childhood compared to other European medieval urban populations (Holck and Kvaal 2000; Jensen 2018).

The Construction of the Self through Memory and Food-related Practices

Turning back to the theoretical framework outlined initially, the individual dietary results from Oslo provide constructive tools for reflecting on the dynamics at play between society and the self in relation to food. This discussion is structured around three main themes: the construction of identity through memory

and food-related practices; the negotiation between the self and society; and ultimately, the dynamics between political organization and individual human agency.

Bioarchaeological results can be used to learn more about these 20 specific individuals and the construction of the self by taking a closer look at individual consumption in relation to memory production: "Taste participates in the formation of the self and the creation of the group through shared preferences for certain foods and food combinations. This identity is personal, even though it is shaped by experiences within a cultural tradition" (Hastorf 2017, 30).

The Oslo population included a woman who died when she was approximately 60 years old (Naumann et al. 2019, Table 1), and radiocarbon dating of one of her teeth suggests that she was a child in the period AD 943–1024 (with 80% certainty), as ^{14}C values in teeth are conserved from the time of tooth formation (Sealy, Armstrong, and Schrire 1995). This testifies that she lived during the very first generations of urban settlement in Oslo, and probably through the first stages of urbanization process. We do not know whether she was born and raised in the area of the old town of Oslo – results from strontium analyses in her teeth are consistent with a person spending her childhood somewhere in the extended rural Oslo region, though the results are not conclusive; the values might also represent other geographical regions. Different strontium values in two teeth, representing two different periods during childhood, indicate that she moved during her childhood. What we do know for certain is that she was buried in Oslo during the first phases of urban settlement, and thus probably lived within the town or the extended settlement that was part of the urban community.

These details provide us with a range of information that can be linked to her memory production. She experienced a high degree of variation on many levels during her life, not only as a result of moving between different locations, but also through the urbanization process, which included settlement expansion and the ensuing impact on the dynamics between the rural area surrounding Oslo and the expanding town, and subsequent shifts in political structure. Also, she reached a significant age, at least compared to the contemporary life expectancies of her time, and arguably underwent different identities during various stages of her life.

In her ongoing process of memory production, how did she make active and unintentional choices to selectively remember – and selectively forget? While a vast array of her memory production is lost to us today, there are details that can be exposed through bioarchaeological material. The isotopic data reveals that she ate a combination of different foods, including a significant proportion of fish. The ^{13}C values, used as the most reliable indicator of individual dietary change (Lovell, Nelson, and Schwarcz 1986), suggest that no or very little change occurred in her dietary habits during her childhood, and also between childhood and the last years of life (Naumann et al. 2019). This information communicates a range of

daily social practices that she engaged in, directly or indirectly, in relation to the procurement, preparation, and the consumption of food. For instance, the access to fish had to be constantly upheld throughout her life, from a young age, when those taking care of her made sure, by their own hand or via some form of exchange, that fish was a regular part of her diet, to later in life, when she may or may not have participated in acquiring the fish. The act of fishing and preparing fish involves a multitude of actions connected to the production and maintenance of equipment, access to and knowledge of fishing activities, and a command of proper preparation techniques for this particular food type. Without doubt, these actions and the very consumption of the meal involved a sensorial and emotional involvement deeply rooted in memory production through taste, smell, sight, sounds, and social interaction (Hastorf 2017). The repetitive actions would have actively produced and reproduced embodied memory that was maintained from her very early childhood to the end of her life. As food consumption is arguably tightly bound to identity production (Schrader 2019), the maintenance of food-related experiences should be understood as a constant reproduction of identity – through the memory of a previous self.

Another individual from the Oslo population was a male likely born between AD 1028 and 1184, representing a later generation of the urban inhabitants. He was approximately 60–70 years old at the time of death, and had, like the previously discussed woman, a diet consisting of both a substantial amount of land-based food as well as fish. The ^{13}C-values show that his diet varied to a very limited extent, if at all. Strontium values suggest that he may have moved around during childhood, but high strontium values indicate that he likely resided in the Oslo region at least during his late childhood / adolescence. The strontium values do not allow for an identification of place of residence during the latter part of his life, but he was eventually buried in Oslo, having reached an advanced age. He does not seem to have undergone any dietary change in the course of his life, despite the fact that he probably did move around, at least as a child, indicating that he came from nearby, and that he moved within the Oslo region, possibly between different farms connected to the urban settlement and the town. The town expanded markedly during this time period, accompanied by an increase in political and religious regulations. Even so, this individual likely continued the eating habits established in his earliest childhood until the end of his life.

The Negotiation between the Self and Society

In the case of the analyzed individuals from Oslo, then, there emerges an identity that is representative for the collective, a communal form of identity, by

nature more fixed and constant than the dynamic form of identity often observed at an individual level (Meskell 2001; Gardner 2011). This argument is based on the observation that the repetitive experience regarding eating habits was true for most people within this study, and thus the repetition of food-related activities was essential in identity production, contributing to an overarching, collective identity shared by a group of people over several generations.

Even though individuals reconstructed food-related activities and identities through memory production, there is dietary variation *between* the analyzed individuals – that is, these 20 people had fundamentally different food-related experiences – but those experiences appear to have been consistent throughout the individuals' lives. This long-term consistency of habits provides a concrete example of group identity that undoubtedly defined a separation between "us" and "them" – individuals defining themselves as belonging to a certain group (for instance, to a specific family) through the fellowship of shared everyday practices in food procurement, preparation, and consumption. Given that most individuals in this study arguably upheld a fixed element of identity through the maintenance of food-related experience, the very continuation of communal identity construction might be considered in relation to power negotiations between the self and society. This communal identity can possibly also be relevant for discussing levels of human agency and the ability to influence one's living conditions within an early and expanding urban environment.

The Dynamics between Political Organization and Individual Human Agency

What then is the relationship between this communal and fixed identity construction and general power relations and individual agency in the early urban community of Oslo? Returning to the conclusions about human food preferences drawn by Paul Rozin (1976), it seems relevant to dwell for a moment on the foodstuffs available in early medieval Oslo, and what food was actually consumed. As previously mentioned, although many details regarding individual consumption are lost to us, we can still draw some general conclusions about individual diet among the 20 analyzed individuals. We know from the faunal remains that a number of animals and marine species were exploited and thus available for the town's population (Øye 1998; Hufthammer 2015). Furthermore, the isotopic results indicate that all 20 individuals consumed a varied diet, most of them eating a combination of foods from land and sea, and none of them eating exclusively

marine foods or plants. It thus seems most likely that a varied diet is more likely to be the preferred diet of most people, both from an anthropological and a nutritional perspective, rather than a consistent diet with little variation. This conclusion is further supported by previous results from osteological analyses (Holck and Kvaal 2000; Jensen 2018), suggesting that the urban population suffered relatively little malnutrition. Also, as people are generally conservative in food selection, with a general skepticism about trying new and unfamiliar foods (Rozin 1976), the dietary consistency should be understood as an active and preferred individual choice rather than an involuntary and forced activity. Last, but not least, the overall consistent food habits of this pool of people occurred during a period of Christianization, a process that is documented to have involved strong political efforts to impose regulations on the general population, prohibiting certain types of meat that were previously consumed, and imposing several fasting days during the cycle of the year. This suggests that people actively resisted the restrictions and regulations concerning their everyday dietary habits. Thus, although a combination of change in eating regimens as well as malnutrition could have been the expected result of imposed and involuntary dietary regulations, the bioarchaeological results from early medieval Oslo indicate that during a period of expansion, Christianization, and increased political presence, there was a high level of human agency, as evidenced by dietary consistency and adequate nutrition.

In conclusion, I would like to propose two possible explanations for the nutritional stability of this population: 1) during the early phase of urbanization, a centralized authority wielded little control over the population, and/or 2) the political organization of urban expansion in Oslo's earliest phases permitted some level of individual agency in terms of individual living conditions, thus allowing for consistency in daily food-related practices. Either way, it can be argued that food-related experiences should be considered in close relation to identity construction and active memory production. These experiences contributed to the forming of overarching and fixed group identities that shaped the self and society in early medieval Oslo. Food practice in medieval Oslo played an essential part in the negotiation and establishment of the self, and of social identity as part of individual memory.

During periods of religious, political, and organizational change within the expanding urban settlement of medieval Oslo, multiple generations maintained a continuity of food practices related to food procurement, preparation, and the meal itself, which then contributed to a maintenance of cultural identity.

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Appendix 1: Stable isotope results of individuals from the Clemens Church

Individual	Sex	Age	Element	$\delta\,^{15}N_{AIR}$	%N	$\delta\,^{13}C_{V\text{-}PDB}$	%C	Sr^{86}/Sr^{87}	^{14}C Calibrated age (95,4% probability)
2561	Female	16–18							
			M1	11,93	15,63	−20,99	44,46	0,7152	
			M2	11,74	14,73	−20,78	42,26	0,7137	
			M3	12,34	14,09	−20,36	42,25	0,7124	
2562	Possible male	25–35							
			M1	13,90	16,14	−19,86	43,52	0,7136	
			M2	13,97	16,73	−19,12	45,28	0,7128	
			M3	15,19	15,64	−18,17	42,29	0,7117	
			BONE	14,25	12,65	−18,16	34,38	–	
2563	Female	60–70							
			M1	15,57	16,02	−18,59	43,58		
			M2	14,88	16,41	−18,89	44,59		
			BONE	14,67	14,62	−18,92	39,77		
2564	Female	15–25							
			M1	13,82	14,86	−19,31	40,62	0,7131	
			M2	13,38	15,51	−19,38	42,07	0,7135	
			BONE	13,85	14,16	−18,87	38,58	–	
2565	Female	–							
			M1	13,97	15,97	−19,05	43,18	0,7130	
			M2	13,75	16,05	−19,03	43,22	0,7126	
			M3	14,57	15,70	−18,40	42,62	0,7126	
			BONE	13,61	11,95	−18,97	33,45	–	

2566	Male	15–25							
			M1	12,85	16,12	−20,31	43,38	0,7139	
			M2	14,01	14,51	−19,72	38,87	0,7142	
			M3	15,49	15,11	−17,67	40,80	0,7128	
			BONE	14,39	11,22	−18,35	31,32	–	
2567	Female	60							
			M1	15,26	15,26	−18,83	43,22	0,7123	943–1024 AD (81%)
			M2	15,15	16,75	−19,00	45,48	0,7108	
			BONE	14,27	12,03	−19,18	32,95	–	
2568	Female	–							
			M1	12,21	14,68	−21,09	39,56	0,7091	
			M2	12,36	15,96	−20,49	42,51	0,7151	
			BONE	11,47	13,49	−20,80	36,96	–	
2569	Female	13–15							
			M1	13,11	15,94	−19,70	43,98	0,7130	
			M2	12,37	16,88	−19,55	46,90	0,7126	
			BONE	12,49	15,20	−19,71	41,54	–	
2570	Male	30–35							
			M1	14,43	16,21	−19,71	43,52	0,7144	
			M2	14,42	15,54	−18,95	41,68	0,7133	
			M3	14,02	16,57	−18,94	44,65	0,7119	
			BONE	13,66	14,53	−18,63	38,90	–	
5213	Male	55–65							
			M1	13,15	14,53	−19,17	41,95	0,7099	
			M2	13,19	14,33	−19,10	41,41	0,7098	1295–1404 AD
			M3	13,46	13,74	−18,94	39,59	0,7099	
			BONE	13,43	14,22	−18,74	40,23	–	

(continued)

Appendix 1 (continued)

Individual	Sex	Age	Element	$\delta^{15}N_{AIR}$	%N	$\delta^{13}C_{V\text{-}PDB}$	%C	Sr^{86}/Sr^{87}	^{14}C Calibrated age (95,4% probability)
5216	Female	25–35							
			M1	12,29	14,87	−20,15	42,67	0,7117	
			M2	13,02	14,11	−19,68	40,06	0,7121	
			M3	13,51	14,31	−19,75	40,86	0,7115	
			BONE	12,95	14,26	−19,66	40,15	–	
5217	Male	55–65							
			M1	12,05	14,43	−19,45	41,11	0,7087	
			M2	11,95	13,63	−19,95	41,65	0,7092	
			M3	13,01	14,80	−19,06	42,01	0,7087	
			BONE	14,14	15,98	−20,23	46,13	–	
5218	Male	45–55							
			M1	11,74	17,30	−20,31	48,42	0,7131	
			M2	11,66	16,46	−20,40	46,01	0,7128	
			M3	12,69	15,29	−20,41	43,12	0,7123	
			BONE	13,25	14,69	−20,30	41,96	–	
5219	Female	60–65							
			M1	11,57	16,15	−21,41	43,59	0,7156	
			M2	11,66	13,79	−21,25	37,48	0,7151	1025–1160 AD
			M3	12,04	16,26	−20,92	43,81	0,7147	
			BONE	12,53	15,64	−20,90	42,03	–	
5268	Female	20–25							
			M1	10,33	16,00	−20,43	44,98	0,7171	
			M2	10,73	17,37	−19,92	48,88	0,7091	
			M3	10,43	17,98	−20,73	51,96	0,7091	
			BONE	10,61	15,90	−20,21	45,18	–	

5269	Male	45–55							
			M1	10,66	16,89	−20,51	48,93	0,7123	
			M2	11,58	16,30	−20,09	45,97	0,7113	
			M3	12,38	17,31	−19,56	47,88	0,7111	
			BONE	11,35	16,83	−20,01	47,48	–	
5270	Unknown	40–50							
			M1	11,59	16,29	−21,42	46,38	0,7129	
			M2	11,40	16,51	−21,68	47,36		
			M3	11,94	15,65	−21,82	45,05		
			BONE	11,70	13,54	−21,68	39,07	–	
5271	Female	35–40							
			M1	11,53	14,75	−21,12	41,76	0,7168	
			M2	11,42	13,06	−21,08	38,42	0,7147	
			M3	10,88	14,91	−20,99	42,88	0,7147	
			BONE	10,61	15,95	−21,02	46,57	–	
5272	Male	60–70							
			M1	12,53	15,00	−20,55	44,42	0,7119	
			M2	13,05	13,64	−20,37	39,26	0,7110	1028–1184 AD
			M3	12,33	14,38	−20,71	41,35	0,7123	
			BONE	13,43	17,16	−20,33	48,52	–	

Sarah Croix

Identifying "Occasions" of the Self in Viking-Age Scandinavia: Textile Production as Gendered Performance in Its Social and Spatial Settings

Abstract: This contribution interrogates the gendered self in a Viking-Age, Scandinavian context. It proposes that the performance of a particular craft, weaving, may have created "occasions" for different experiences of the self, when conducted in different social and spatial settings. Through the analysis of the distribution of the archaeological remains from textile production at selected settlement sites, it is possible to associate specific spaces in buildings to this activity, and to situate it within households of different social statuses. As a result, the experiences of distinct groups of women are revealed through the different settings, both social and architectural, for the performance of a stereotypically gendered activity. This performance therefore appears imbued with very different meanings, hereby leading to varied experiences of the social self. The character of the activity itself, which is repetitive as well as physically and technically demanding, may have contributed to a deeply embodied sense of self, even in the seemingly mundane arena of everyday life.

Keywords: social space, textile production, gender, setting, embodied performance, occasionalism, experience of the self

Can we imagine a form of human experience without a sense of self? By focusing on the Middle Ages, the contributions in this volume highlight how historically contextual the understanding and expression of the self is, but also how its cognitive and psychological dimension may transcend cultures across time and space. The concept of the self is closely intertwined with that of the individual. The historiography of individualism and individuality has variously placed the birth of the individual in the Renaissance, the French and Industrial Revolutions, or the twelfth-century medieval renaissance (Bagge 1997; see also the editors' Introduction in this volume). Does that mean that there was no individual prior to any of those dates? The usual cues for investigating this question are seemingly

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absent from contemporary sources for the Viking Age in Scandinavia: there are no autobiographies or commissioned portraits, and dress styles are mainly known from funerary contexts, where their wearers were clothed by others. On the other hand, runic inscriptions including personal names and carved on functional objects provide a rather unique insight into Viking-Age self-expressions and stresses the involvement of material culture in this process (see also Karen Holmqvist, this volume).

Rather than seeking to identify and analyze expressions of the self, this contribution proposes an intellectual exercise, assuming the existence of some form of self in this period and hypothesizing which occasions would have triggered a particular experience of the self's own sense of agency in a Viking-Age, Scandinavian context. In this chapter, a stereotypically gendered activity, textile production, will be seen as circumscribing a group of social actors. The different settings for the performance of this activity, dwellings and small, half-subterranean outbuildings also known as sunken-featured buildings at various types of settlements, will be closely studied in order to discuss and distinguish possible variations in how the performance of the same activity may have led to different experiences of the self.

Theoretical Background

From a philosophical and psychological point of view, the "self" can be considered as the experience and expression of one's awareness of one's own form of individuality. This process operates as a negotiation, as it involves the individual distinguishing and/or assimilating with significant others and larger social groups. This results in three forms of self, the individual, the relational, and the collective, all three co-existing in the individual (Sedikides and Brewer 2002). The perception of the self is thus not fixed but dialectically and contextually variable, and it is closely connected to a sense of agency and the ability to choose, control, and see one's actions as one's own – and to the fact of being denied such ability (e.g., Hohwy 2006). As a result, it is a social phenomenon, which cannot emerge in isolation. While psychological and emotional experiences, tastes, and interpretation of cultural norms can be shared with others, experiences of the self are perceived as being unique. The body, which both binds the self to the material world and allows us to be "in the world" (see Merleau-Ponty 1945), creates a privileged arena for experiencing and representing the self, but recent debates about the "finiteness" of the body has also challenged the notion of the individuality of the self (van Wolputte 2004).

From a philosophical point of view, this understanding of the self is in parts inspired by Erwin Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Although criticized on various occasions, his proposal remains useful to explain the individual's efforts to handle social relations through impression management, which may vary depending on the degree of intimacy between the actors involved (Raffel 2013). Furthermore, appearances are not always mere façade; postmodernist theory considers that such performances and experiences can even become world-building and reality-shaping (see Austin 1962). Any social interaction involves communication, which is necessarily codified to be understandable. Using theatrical play as metaphor for social behavior, Goffman paints daily life as a performance where social actors use pre-established roles suitable in the given situation in order to achieve the desired effect. Understanding the self as situational allows for different and even contradictory "selves" within one individual. From this, we can extract the notion of a form of duality in the presentation of self, which is both constricted and enabled by role-play, whether that be intentional / conscious or involuntary / routinized. Goffman also stressed how social actors try to influence perception of their behaviors through setting (the stage), appearance (the costume), behavior (body language, voice tone), etc. This means that architectural spaces, understood as settings, provide the "stage" for the presentation of the self through performance, and variation in setting allows for different expressions and experiences of the self, including the gendered self.

The theory of performativity has had a major impact on the humanities since the 1990s, especially regarding gender studies. Judith Butler in particular has discussed gender as being something that not simply "is" but something that is enacted (Butler 1990). While her work has been criticized on various fronts, including for lacking scholarly ethics and for disengaging with actual feminist issues (e.g., Nussbaum 1999), one of her main contributions has been to stress how gender is constituted and becomes "real" through repeated associations or citations, especially the performance of bodily practices, but also "real" in the moment, through the selection, adaptation, and rejection of socially expected roles and attributes culturally defined as gendered. The involvement of material attributes for the recurrent practices leading to the construction of gender affords an entryway for archaeologists to explore this matter in past societies (e.g., Joyce 2004; Sørensen 2006).

The "performative turn" has also led to a variety of approaches in historical studies (Burke 2005) and has raised the question of individual agency and the possibility of "negotiating" within the broader frameworks of social structures, mainly addressed by microhistory. For Peter Burke, the main contribution of this trend has been, by acknowledging flexibility of behavior in relation to norms, to shed light on what he has called "occasionalism" – the fact that "on different

occasions (moments, locales) or in different situations, in the presence of different people the same person behaves differently" (Burke 2008, 97–98). Inspired by these various theoretical and historiographical trends, the approach of the present contribution is thus based on the premises that the self is multiple, relational, and variable according to settings and audiences; that the gendered self is performative, and that performance is reality-shaping; that performance involves bodily practice and material culture, following codes and norms in order to be understandable; and that the self can be circumscribed by identifying "occasions" during which specific performances led to specific experiences of the self.

Finding the Self in Settlement Contexts

There are inherent challenges to studying the self on the basis of archaeological remains, which revolve around the nature of archaeological data. Very often, archaeology is poorly equipped to individualize actors behind the formation and deposition of physical remains. Even in mortuary contexts, where the presence of human bodies may give us the impression of a close encounter with past individuals, we often remain confronted with their anonymity and passivity. Increasingly, however, archaeology is able to reconstruct bits of individual biographies containing particular life experiences by applying natural scientific techniques to the study of human remains (Elise Naumann, this volume).

In Viking-Age Scandinavia, settlement sites can be considered as the primary economic and domestic unit, a place where most people's social and work life unfolded within the frame of the household (see Egil L. Bauer in this volume for a medieval, urban case). In these contexts, the archaeological remains are both intentional (for example, the cutting of a hole in the ground to place an upright post in it or the dumping of waste in specifically assigned areas) and functional (lost artifacts and most ecofacts) (see, e.g., Eggert 2001, 105–21). Besides its relationality, the experience of self is one that pertains to the individual. The archaeological remains of everyday life in settlement contexts appear to us as a palimpsest of actions performed by a range of anonymous actors, which are virtually impossible to separate (for a general discussion of the nature of the archaeological data, see, e.g., Schiffer 1976, 1987, 2010; Binford 1981; Lucas 2012). Instead of distinct individuals with their own experiences and paths, we are typically dealing with a more diffuse aggregate of agents: a larger, anonymous collective. Contrary to funerary contexts, where we assume that the actions of the mourners are intentional and that we may be able to decipher these intentions, the degree of intentionality and self-expression behind the actions which led to the deposition of artifacts

and structures in the ground at settlement sites is often less obvious. For example, was there any statement of self behind the dumping of a bucket of ash in a midden? Should we read in it the frustration of an angry teenager who was sent to take out the trash and who demonstratively dumped it right in front of the door?

Technological knowledge and its application to the fabrication of an object may in some cases allow seeing intentionality and individuality in an everyday, settlement setting. Most pottery used in Viking-Age settlements was the result of domestic production. As such, it belongs to the habitus but is not immune to stylistic innovation (e.g., Roslund 2001; Naum 2012). The potter would repeat an established pattern ("this is how a proper pot should look") while introducing some personal elements to variable degree based on knowledge, experience, taste, and intended purpose. These traits may have been even more salient for manufactures of greater technological complexity, such as the casting of copper-alloy jewelry. The identity of the manufacturer is unknown, but his or her self may still be perceptible in the style of the object. Studies of styles in the manufacture of metal ornaments at the early towns suggest different "schools" producing the same type of objects with distinct stylistic and technical elements (Sindbæk 2011; Pedersen 2015). This may reflect the traditions and innovations of distinct workshops, the skills, know-how, and creativity of individual artisans. In this context, the hand of the artisan may be more telling about his or her self than his or her name. Manufacture is also a highly embodied practice involving a range of sensual and physical experiences provoked through interaction with the matter that is being transformed.

To sum up, it is nearly impossible to disentangle individual actions through the archaeological remains of settlements, and by virtue of this, to identify the performance and experience of the self on a day-to-day basis in the Viking Age based on the archaeological evidence. However, this does not necessarily imply an absence of "self" in this context. Approaching the self through technology as a unique, embodied performance located in the social setting of the household may provide a fruitful avenue to investigate how the self's own sense of agency may have been experienced in Viking-Age Scandinavia.

Textile Production as Female Stereotype

The gendered self is one particular form of self-experience. While this does not allow separating particular individuals in the archaeological remains of settlements, identifying gendered experiences, to which particular markers and roles

may be attached, may allow seeing if not individual, at least narrowed down and more specific experiences of self. The runic objects bearing personal names mentioned in the introduction contain both female and male names, suggesting that both men and women could express their selves through this particular mode of expression.

Considering the difficulties in pinpointing individualized experiences of self, we are left to speculate about what would be a typical gendered experience of self, in other words, which socially and culturally defined roles and attributes were available to social actors in order for them to negotiate their own gendered self in the Viking Age. This question has and continues to animate research (for a recent overview, see Moen 2019), and there is no room here to review the various interpretations of who did what in Viking-Age Scandinavia. Based on my previous research (Croix 2012), in the following I will be working on the premise that the idea of (at least) a male as well as a female gender existed in the Viking Age, to which were commonly associated a range of distinct social roles. Among them, I would argue that, if textile production was not exclusively performed by women – that is, social individuals understood as belonging to the female gender, and that not all women were involved in this production – it was at least thought of as being associated to the female gender.

Textile production was one of the most important forms of production in early medieval northwestern Europe, for clothing and domestic equipment, ranging from sacks for transport to tapestries with detailed narratives (e.g., Rogers 2007; Netherton and Owen-Crocker 2005) and, especially in a Scandinavian, Viking-Age context, sail production (Andersson 1999; Andersson 2003). The scale and complexity of the production, involving a range of actors and processes on a daily basis and year-round, implies that it had broad ramifications throughout the social matrix. It can also be considered as part of the female stereotype. This association is indeed recurrent, though not exclusive, in many Viking-Age contexts: in burials (Croix 2012, 60–61, and references therein), on runic objects (e.g., inscription N 582 on spindle-whorl from Uppstad, Aust-Agder: "Helga owns this spindle-whorl": *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*, 5:198–9; on runic objects and personal names in runic inscriptions, Imer 2007; Peterson 2007), and kennings (e.g., vef-Gefn {the weaving-Gefn <= Freyja>} [WOMAN], stanza 7; *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* 2009, 2:94–6; on kennings, Meissner 1921).

While runic objects relating to ownership appear embedded in daily practice, funerary rituals and skaldic poetry represent arenas for social negotiations and idealized representations, meant to be performed in front of an audience in order to, among other things, commemorate known people and deeds (e.g., Oestigaard and Goldhahn 2006; Williams 2013; Guðrún Nordal 2012). While some elements of the performance may evoke these facts rather directly, both commemorative forms use

various poetical means to highlight particular roles and attributes pertaining to their referents: the objects involved in the mortuary ritual acts and the kennings. Both have been seen as referring to known stories of mythological character (Price 2010; Marold 2012, lxxxiv–lxxxv), thus acting as a form of eulogy. The kennings existed independently from the poetical context in which they were used (Marold 2012, lxxxii) and, while some obtained their meaning from referring to known stories, others seem to have been constructed based on an observable, recurring pattern. As such, they played on existing stereotypes, using attributes available within the cultural repertoire and widely understood within their cultural context to provide basic information about their referents. The attitudes and values displayed in representational contexts thus refer to codes, symbols, and norms, which would have been expected, known, and understood. This implies that, even though sociological studies suggest that stereotypes are often more rigid than reality, they remain to some extent bound to an observable pattern, which may not be absolute, but which repeats itself sufficiently to create a relatively stable association (Krueger, Hasman, Acevedo, and Villano 2003; Kite, Deaux, and Haines 2008). Therefore, it is through the repeated association between the female gender and the fabrication of textiles that the doing of the second became a stereotypical role for the first, hereby creating an arena through which a gendered self could be experienced in Viking-Age Scandinavia.

The Setting of Performance: Spaces of Textile Production

Different settings may have led to variable experiences of self, and the household, composed of individuals of different gender, status, and age, provided the main social arena for the performance and experience of self on a daily basis in Viking-Age Scandinavia. This makes dwellings and attached buildings at Viking-Age farmsteads the main setting for the experience of a gendered self. The functions of these buildings, their architectural features, temporality, accessibility, and degree of visual integration all created distinct settings for the performance of daily activities, which may have affected the experience of their users. Through the careful analysis of the spatial distribution of textile tools at rural settlement sites from Viking-Age Scandinavia, spinning and weaving, two key elements of textile production, appear to have been performed both inside sunken-featured buildings and dwellings. The significance of this observation can be discussed further by considering three main examples. The first deals with how textile production was performed in different settings on the same

farmstead, thus affecting the experience of self as more relational or intimate, and the second with how a particular social setting can have created a particular occasion for representing oneself. Finally, the third raises the question of whether the co-existence of different settings implies the existence of different experiences of gendered selves intersecting with social status.

The performance of textile working inside dwellings is relatively well attested on Viking-Age agrarian settlements, despite often problematic preservation conditions or degree of archaeological documentation, both in today's Denmark, for example at Vorbasse, or in the Scandinavian diaspora in Iceland, for example at Aðalstræti and Vatnsfjörður (Croix 2012, 171–9; Croix 2014, 120–2; see also Hvass 1980, 2011; Milek 2006, 2012; Milek and Roberts 2013). While spindle-whorls can be found scattered in different rooms, weaving tends to be associated with the main dwelling room in the center of the house. Usually, the loom would have been placed in a corner of the room. There are some obvious practical reasons for this. It is a rather large object, which is not easily moved once it is set up, and it is best to keep it out of the way. It also needs to lean against a wall, so it has its necessary place in a peripheral position, and although weaving requires some light, it may have been best to keep the loom away from the open fireplace. Generally speaking, the main dwelling room of a Viking-Age longhouse is a rather large and open space with a high degree of visual integration. The occurrence of weaving in this setting suggests an activity which was integrated, together with those who were engaged in it, in the daily routine of the household. Even if it did not involve all its members, all were certainly aware of it. The performance of this activity in this particular context may have led to experiencing one's social self in negotiation with social stereotypes and of one's position in the household.

In some instances, sunken-featured buildings associated specifically with textile production are found on the same farmsteads as those where the activity was also attested in dwellings, such as in the examples mentioned above. It has been argued that sunken-featured buildings offer highly suitable conditions for weaving, in terms of light and relative dampness, as they are partly under ground level (Zimmerman 1982, 133), but obviously, these conditions were not an absolute necessity. As a rule, the chronology of these buildings is no further assessed than belonging to the same phase of settlement, which is often roughly defined as spanning a period of 50–100 years or more. Whether textile production was moved from one space to the other cannot be assessed at present, and the two settings for this activity, the main dwelling area and the sunken-featured building, appear to have been used simultaneously. Assuming that this is true, how should it be understood? There may be differences of status within the household, implying that the activity was attributed different meanings depending on who performed it, and as a result, implying different locations for its production. It may also be the same

persons using both spaces at different times. In this case, the setting may have contributed to a particular experience of the gendered self. Although not a strictly secluded space as such, the sunken-featured building, through its small dimensions, low degree of accessibility, and functional specialization, was the arena for only limited forms of social encounters. Therefore, besides being architecturally two very different structures, the main dwelling room and the sunken-featured building offered very different possibilities in terms of integration of textile production in the daily routine of the household as a whole. We can wonder if this situation indicates two different experiences of self for the same women: between an essentially social and relational self, defined in a dialectical manner in relation with other members of the household in a collective setting; or a more individual self, where the performance of weaving may have led to a more personal experience of self, triggered by isolation or intimate interaction with the few other individuals present engaging in the same activity.

The question of the social significance of textile production becomes more explicit when considering the dwellings of the social elite. Archaeology often discusses the elite self in terms of status, which needs to be expressed by using various markers and symbols (for example conspicuous consumption). This is based on the assumption that the elite is particularly concerned with asserting its status and has therefore a more acute sense of self and need for self-representation. The positioning of the elite towards social norms can be seen as that of the extreme, either following them to the letter, which makes good sense, as they are the same norms that allow them to be on top, or by challenging them entirely, hereby asserting that they can do so without negative consequences. Either way, it reflects a prominent sense of self, balancing between the pros and cons of individuality and collectivity. Few Viking-Age buildings illustrate the representation of the social elite as prominently as the longhouse at Borg in Lofoten (Herschend and Mikkelsen 2003). Its monumental construction and ostentatious display of wealth leave little doubt about the elevated social position of its household. The central room of the building has been interpreted as a hall with representational functions, inspired by the images of festivities inherited from the medieval Icelandic literary sources. It is also a rather open space, with a high degree of visibility. At the same time, it appears as a multi-functional space hosting domestic activity, in contrast with more specialized hall buildings as known in South Scandinavia.

There are, however, some differences from the dwellings of the more "regular" farmsteads. The loom is, as usual, placed along a wall, but not in a corner. Instead, it is located in a more central position, very close to the central fireplace (Croix 2011, 119–21, Fig. 1). Considering the assumed representational functions of this room, it likely provided the setting for social gatherings where hierarchies

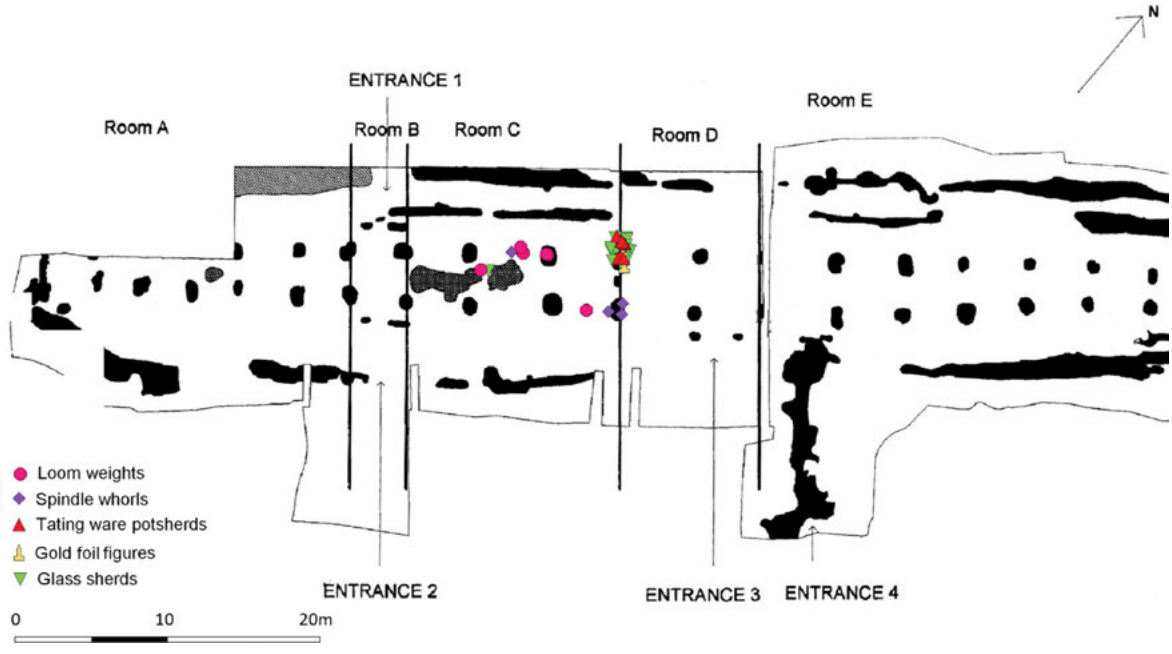

Fig. 1: Plan of the late Iron-Age / Viking-Age longhouse at Borg in Lofoten. This large building, more than 80m long, was subdivided into a number of rooms by entrance areas. Suggested partition walls and entrances are indicated. Room C with its open fire-place is interpreted as the main dwelling room, which also acted as a hall on occasions. The distribution of rich finds, being imports and/or made of precious materials, supports the special status of Room C. The distribution of tools for textile production associates this activity – and its actors – to the same space. Plan after Herschend and Kaldal Mikkelsen 2003, p. 52, fig. 6A.12; find distribution drawn by the author.

and social relations were negotiated and put on display. Perhaps the loom was removed in those occasions – but what if it was not? The use of the loom in a kenning for women hints at the fact that the stereotype and norm of women weaving was to be understood and accepted in the higher spheres of society to whom skaldic poetry was most frequently dedicated. Therefore, the loom may have been left standing in a central, visible position, stressing the adhesion of the highest-ranked women in the household to social standards – and perhaps on these occasions only, leaving the care for daily production to others. The respect for conventions may have been a means of self-representation for women of the elite.

While social differences may not be readily observed within single settlements such as the farmsteads described earlier or the elite building of Borg in Lofoten, they may be revealed through the more complex socio-spatial organization of a settlement like Aggersborg (Roesdahl, Sindbæk, and Pedersen 2014), where textile working is attested in different settings (Croix, Roesdahl, and Jørgensen 2014, 377–8). Before the construction of the large ring-fortress in the later part of the tenth century, the site by the Limfjord consisted of several farmsteads (Sindbæk 2014, 109–32, Fig. 2), where textile working is attested in the main dwelling room, as often seen at agrarian settlements. There was also a larger longhouse, house D, the construction of which did not differ markedly from the other farmhouses apart from its dimensions, dominant position in the landscape, longevity, and its more exclusive modes of consumption (Sindbæk 2014, 116–21, Fig. 3). The activity of weaving is attested in the main dwelling room, as at Borg in Lofoten, while that of spinning is encountered spread throughout the house. Further downhill, there was a large landing site used on a seasonal basis with hundreds of sunken-featured buildings and evidence for market and craft production (Sindbæk 2014, 133–47; Brown, Goodchild, and Sindbæk 2014), including textile production.

These different building forms, connected with different lifestyles (including temporalities, mobilities, modes of consumption, etc), created particular settings for individuals, who most likely belonged to different social groups. On the one hand, one can find the social elite, living in the largest longhouse on top of the hill and the households with the agrarian lifestyle; on the other hand, the seasonal visitors, staying in the sunken-featured buildings for the period of time it took them to perform what may have been enforced labour. In this context, the performance of fabricating textiles may have contributed to the experience of a particular sense of self. For women of higher status living in the longhouse on top of the hill, weaving may have meant little more than the assertion of their gendered self in relation to the collective norms of their social group, as at Borg in Lofoten, with some but likely not decisive economic significance. For the

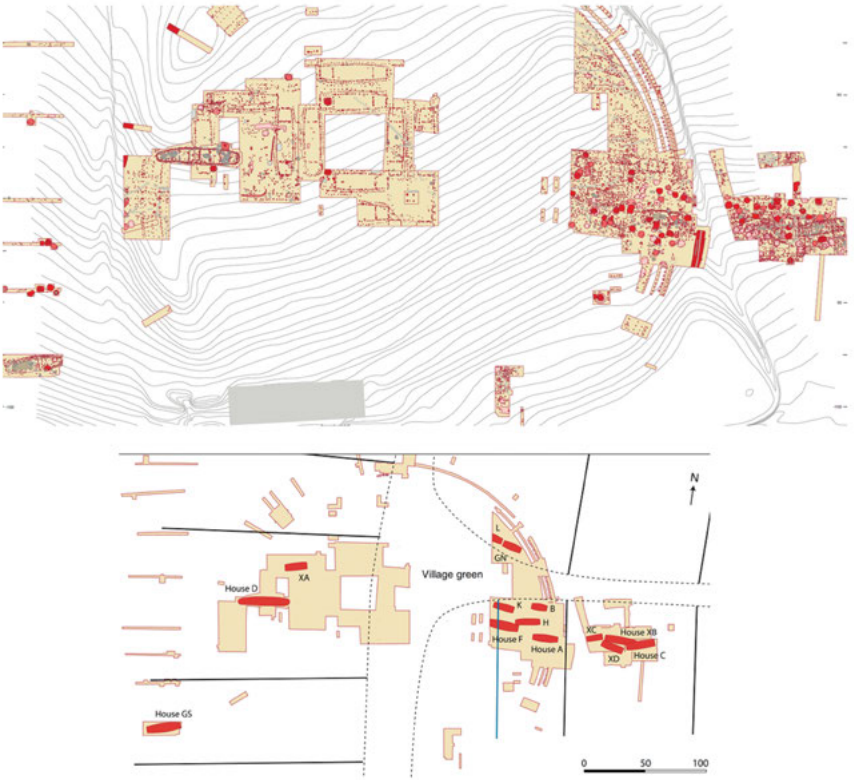

Fig. 2: Aggersborg in the Viking Age. (above) The Viking-Age occupation at Aggersborg has left a palimpsest of archaeological features associated to different phases, the latest of which was a huge circular fortress. The pre-fortress settlement included a large number of sunken-featured buildings (red fill). Magnetometer surveys suggest that hundreds more of these small buildings should be added to the existing figures, especially in the area to the south. The topography of the area features a gentle slope from the north towards the shores of the Limfjord to the south. (below) From the pre-fortress settlement a number of post-built longhouses, probably from farmsteads, were identified. The vast majority of the sunken-featured buildings belongs to the same phase. Above: After Roesdahl, Sindbæk, Pedersen & Wilson (ed.) 2014, plate 2; below: after Sindbæk 2014, p. 135, fig. 4.55.

women living on the farmsteads, in Denmark or in Iceland, it may have been part of a daily routine, integrated in the life of the household and its economy of subsistence, contributing to asserting their role in the household and their relation to their significant others. For those who stayed for a season in sunken-featured buildings along the shore, however, textile production may have meant coerced and strenuous work, associated with yearly recurring periods away from

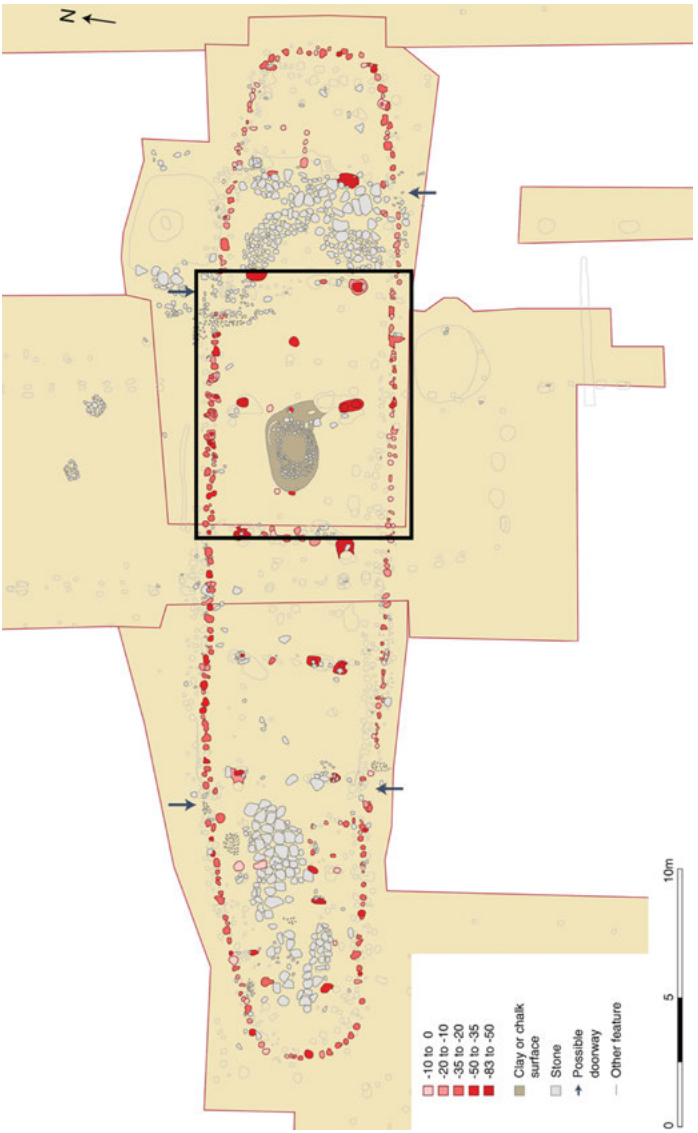

Fig. 3: Aggersborg – house D. The Viking-Age longhouse was probably the main building of a magnate's farm. It was 40 meters long and divided into rooms with various functions including a stable/byre to the west. The main dwelling room (in the black frame) was equipped with a fire-place on the median axis, and the distribution of tools for textile production throughout the building indicates that weaving most likely took place there. The depth of postholes is indicated by shades of red. After Sindbæk 2014, p. 95, fig. 4.13.

"home," and potentially leading to a degraded sense of self linked with a denial of their individual agency. The experience of the gendered self which has been outlined here is thus a correlate of the individuals' social status, which defines specific frameworks in which their sense of agency may be facilitated or inhibited through the performance of the same activity taking different meanings depending on who, where, and for which purpose it was conducted.

Textile Working as Performance

These examples illustrate settings and "occasions" during which a specific dimension of the self may have been experienced in Viking-Age Scandinavia – a gendered self, intersecting with social status. Textile working as the physical performance through which this experience was activated may in itself have contributed to it. Indeed, it is an embodied practice requiring technical knowledge, creativity, and experience. The weaving process on an upright, warp-weighted loom involves the repeated lateral movement of the weft, probably attached to some kind of shuttle, moving back and forth between the warp (Hoffmann 1964). The warp, heavily weighed down by the loom-weights in two sheds or more, is also moved back and forth after each lateral movement of the weft. The weft is set into place using a goblin pin, a weaving comb, or a weaving batten, made of wood, iron, or whalebone. The width of a Viking-Age warp-weighted loom can be estimated to *c*. 1.20–2.00m. This is narrow enough for a single person to be able to slide the weft throughout the width of the warp from one end of the weave to the other, but it cannot be excluded that a second person was involved. The setting up of the loom was certainly more easily achieved by more than one person. Based on a series of reconstructions and calculations, it has previously been suggested that it would take one person at least 2 years to produce a 25m^2 sail (Strand 2015, 16) and 9 years for a 112m^2 sail for a Viking-Age warship (Jørgensen 2012, 178) – a daunting and time-consuming task, which would have required some form of "industrialized" production and cooperation.

Besides a range of sensory experiences connected to the work (the contact with the wool or the linen, its smell, the relative darkness and possibly dampness of the working environment), there are two elements in weaving which make it a particular physical and, through this means, mental experience: its strenuousness and its repetitiveness. The tightening of the weft to its correct place using a weaving batten may have felt rather physically demanding, considering the tension and resistance of the weave and the weight of the instrument. The loom-weights as a complete set were also rather heavy, and their weight would have been felt each

time the shed was moved back and forth. While the shuttle in itself is not heavy or difficult to slide through the warp, its lateral movement is repetitive to say the least. A good-quality weave should ideally be as uniform and regular as possible, with the same thread count per centimeter throughout. Monotonousness is, in this case, a desired goal. A patterned weave introduces some variation, but a rhythmic, mathematically calculated one. Together, strenuousness and repetitiveness make weaving a performance conducted and experienced through the body.

The role of textile working in relation to a particular experience of the self in modern, Western culture, in which this activity is conducted for pleasure and without economic necessity, has been considered within the framework of occupational science (Riley 2008). In this study, textile-making is linked to an enhanced sense of self, enabled by the process of creative doing and the identification as a textile-maker, and to a collective sense of self, as the occupation is conducted within the framework of a community through which knowledge is also transmitted. The rhythmical repetitiveness of weaving has even been described as "a form of flow, where the body is in harmony with the mind" (Riley 2008, 70; see Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

It is not only in modern, Western culture that this dimension of textile working has been linked to a metaphysical, religious experience. The making of altarpieces or "enclosed gardens," using, among other materials, textiles, by sixteenth-century female religious communities in the Low Countries and the Rhineland has been interpreted as "a practice of sensory and devotional meditation" (Baert 2016). In the same context, spinning seems to have been seen as a meditative activity, within but also beyond religious communities (Dlabačová 2018). The meditative effect of spinning may emerge from the repetitiveness of the practice, allowing the subject to get closer to the divine through the alignment of soul and body in a similar way as prayer beads allowed during personal devotion (Heilskov 2019).

Although this notion is suggested within a Christian, medieval context, and is not directly applicable to the cultic practices, world-views, and ontologies of pre-Christian Scandinavia, it does highlight how strenuous, repetitive bodily performance can place the subject into a particular state of mind. In this manner, textile working represents an experience which is bound to the individual through their body and, therefore, potentially, to their sense of self. Would this practice also have allowed meditative or metaphysical experiences in Viking-Age Scandinavia? In this context, the eleventh-century skaldic poem *Darraðarljóð*, preserved in the thirteenth-century *Njáls Saga*, springs to mind (Poole 1991, 116–56). In the poem, a group of valkyries appears to be deciding of the course and outcome of a battle (traditionally identified as the Battle of Clontarf in 1014) as they weave on a warp-weighted loom, where the loom-weights are human

skulls and warp and weft are intestines. While the weaving process has been seen as mere metaphor for the battle, it is tempting to see the repetitive movement of the weft following the rhythm of the poetical form, thus combining the spoken word to the creative performance, as a form of sympathetic magic, in which ritual transformation achieves transformation in the worldly sphere.

Conclusion

Inspired by performance and gender theories and the "performative turn" in historical research, I have sought in this chapter to identify "occasions" during which female individuals may have experienced various dimensions of their self in everyday contexts in Viking-Age Scandinavia. Textile production has been selected as a stereotypical female activity based on a varied set of contemporary evidence. Spinning, and weaving in particular, involved a bodily performance, which could be located in the architectural space of Viking-Age settlement sites based on the distribution of related artifacts in dwellings and sunken-featured buildings documented archaeologically. In this way, it has been possible to show how this activity took place in different settings and for different audiences, and to correlate this performance to various social conditions. By both respecting and confronting societal norms, the performance of the same activity by different groups of individuals at different occasions may have led them to experience different forms of self. Mundane daily activities can therefore be considered as an important part of the experience of self. While the same activities may be performed by many, the settings in which they were performed and by whom gave them different meanings, hereby creating different experiences of the self for those involved, which could be both unique to the individual and similar to those of the collective. The strenuousness and repetitiveness of the work may also have led to an enhanced or a diminished sense of self, depending on the significance and outcome of the work for the practitioner. While the focus of the present contribution has been on the physical, performative dimension of textile production, it would equally be relevant to consider the economic, social, and symbolic significance of textile products of different qualities, forms, styles, and levels of complexity. Could these be considered as forms of self-expressions, thus enlightening a different dimension of the Viking-Age self?

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Egil Lindhart Bauer

Self-expression through Eponymous Tenement Plots in Medieval Oslo

Abstract: While archaeological material rarely reveals tenants of medieval towns, contemporary documents mention eponymous tenement plots, allowing us to approach individual selves. To evaluate whether tenement plot names represented self-expression or practical markers in the townscape, I juxtapose names occurring in documents mentioning four town fires, dating to the period between the thirteenth and sixteenth century, as well as the Black Death. Furthermore, I compare this to changing plot structure at two excavated sites. My investigation suggests that eponymous tenement plots could represent the person who built on a plot, provided it contained no significant buildings which would prevent new names from being conventionalized due to practical reasons of orientation. On the other hand, changing ownership would probably require a new name of a tenement plot if it lay close to significant landmarks.

Keywords: archaeology, diplomas, town yard, blockhouse, property, ownership, name, farm, self-assertion, stone building, boundary, medieval towns

Norwegian documents from the period 1050–1590 mention approximately 70 named tenement plots (*bygårder*, see clarification of terminology below) from medieval Oslo. Roughly half of these were eponymous, reflecting individuals and, presumably, their connection to the tenement plots. While scholars have attempted to identify the individuals behind tenement plot names, particularly in Oslo and Bergen (Bull 1922; Espeland 1929; Brattegard 1944), little attention has been given to *why* many medieval tenement plots were eponymous or whether these names changed – and the reason for such changes.

The total number of tenement plots and their location within Oslo is unknown, but all were situated within a town which covered approximately 27 hectares on a headland in the Bjørvika inlet in the inner Oslofjord. At its height in the fourteenth century, the town had 2,700–3,300 inhabitants, according to estimations by Nedkvitne and Norseng (2000, 179). Archaeological excavations and radiocarbon dating have shown that the urban settlement was established in the first half of the eleventh century (Schia 1987b, 164–5). The high medieval town encompassed

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the king's and the bishop's palaces, five churches, three monasteries, and a hospital. Like other Norwegian medieval towns, Oslo was limited in geographical scope, with a relatively small number of buildings, meaning that the plot names would have been sufficient to navigate by (Helle 1982, 227). After a town-wide fire in 1624, Oslo was abandoned, and the new town of Christiania was established by royal command on the other side of Bjørvika. Grasslands replaced most of the town, and the tenement plot names were forgotten. In contrast, Bergen's medieval town plan has survived until today, with several of the tenement plot names on Bryggen (the dock) still being in use (Brattegard 1944, 283–4).

My aim with this article is to consider whether eponymous tenement plots in medieval Oslo were used as a method of self-expression, i.e., that the tenement plots were named to accentuate oneself in the urban topography. This possibility is evaluated against the practical function of a name as a marker in the town. After a clarification of terminology and delimitation of the material, with considerations of source criticism, I will examine change and development in tenement plots in the archaeological material from two selected sites and compare this with the occurrence of tenement plot names in the diploma material. Moreover, I will look at changes or continuation in the excavated tenement plots, as well as disappearing or reoccurring names in the diplomas, before and after significant town fires between the thirteenth and sixteenth century – and the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century.

My hypothesis is that an eponymous tenement plot could represent two different situations: 1) that the person who built on a plot – regardless of when this occurred in the plot's history – gave his/her name to the tenement plot, whether this was decided by the person him-/herself or others in the community, or 2) that the tenement plot got a new name when this was required in the urban topography – for instance, after the tenement plot was divided into different properties. In either case, an eponymous tenement plot signifies a person's property. In a society with fewer possibilities for lasting self-expression than today,[1] I propose that naming a tenement plot after oneself or a family member could be a way to leave a mark in the urban topography – to say: "This is mine / ours." Thus, rather than dealing with the inner self, I focus on the public sense of individual property.

In this regard, social memory is essential to consider. This is an active and ongoing process, with people remembering or forgetting the past according to the needs of the present (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003, 3). While eponymous tenement plots clearly represented a person, we need to ask who decided what a tenement

1 For instance, through personal freedom to publish texts and images in a range of forums, including numerous social media.

plot would be named, and what constituted a change important enough for a tenement plot to be renamed? Moreover, what made a name remain in the social memory? Many tenement plot names were kept for several generations, even centuries (more on this below). Thus, the names possibly went through a gradual, chronological development from appellatives to proper names, i.e., a process of proprialization. The question is whether the association with a name changed, as time went by, specifically reducing the association with the person behind the eponym after the person's death and the name's integration in the townscape.

While several scholars have done extensive work on the subjects of tenement plots, plots of land, and property in different medieval towns (for instance, Lorentzen 1952; Schia 1987b, 1987c; Wienberg 1992; Ersland 1994, 2011), no scholars have previously attempted a similar interdisciplinary analysis of eponymous tenement plots from Norway's urban Middle Ages. In general, places names have rarely been used as a source in archaeological research (Dalberg and Sørensen 1979, 23). By juxtaposing archaeological material and names in written sources, my goal is to contribute to our understanding of how citizens' names were connected to tenement plots and property in medieval Oslo.

Clarifications of Terminology

The Norwegian term *bygård* literally means "town farm," and Schia (1987a, 16) defines it as a collection of buildings with different functions, including a courtyard, on a relatively densely settled plot of land demarcated by boundaries. Compared to agrarian farms, the *bygård* covered a small area. The terminology is inconsistent in English translations: Schia and Molaug use the term "townyard" (Schia 1992; Molaug 2004). However, *bygård* is translated to English in different ways, for instance as "house-block" (Brattegard 1944) or "town plot" (Hansen 2015). I prefer the term "tenement plot," as it comprises two elements: both the dwelling, often with more than one family, and the area of land. The plot was usually divided by boundaries, visible in the archaeological material, such as fences or drainage ditches. A tenement plot could comprise more than one property, and could be divided between several people, families, or households, for instance, in halves or quarters. Some buildings or rooms could even be of joint use. Some dwellers owned their tenement plot, while others rented (DN IV, 965; Schia 1987d, 222–3; 1987b, 192; 1987a, 16, 20; Wienberg 1992, 97–8; Helle et al. 2006, 104).

Property boundaries within tenement plots are not readily visible in the archaeological material. Several scholars have discussed ownership and right of use in medieval towns, especially Bergen (Lorentzen 1952; Ersland 1994, 2011), but also Tønsberg (Wienberg 1992). It is characteristic of northern European medieval

towns, including Oslo, that the user of a tenement plot, usually corresponding with the owner of the buildings, was not the same as the owner of the plot of land. Right of use, the *dominium utile*, was rented from the plot owner (Ersland 2011, 16). In Oslo, as in several medieval towns, the plot owner was likely the king, who divided and distributed the plots (Nedkvitne and Norseng 2000, 44). However, the tenant commonly had sovereignty over the plot. The rent furthermore regulated the tenant's legal status in the town (Ersland 2011, 94–5).

Delimitation of the Material

Eponymous tenement plots make up approximately half of the tenement plot names occurring in the diplomas dealing with Oslo. This is similar to the ratio in the material from medieval Tønsberg (Wienberg 1992, 57–60), but a greater ratio compared to Bergen (Lorentzen 1952, 263–5). As many as 80% of the eponymous tenement plots consist of a person's name and the ending *-gård*, and I will return to a possible reason for this when discussing self-expression versus practical function of eponymous tenement plots. Some tenement plots are referred to by their owner's name, for instance, Hr. Påls gård ("Sir Pål's tenement plot") (DN V, 147, 168) and Hr. Gyrds gård ("Sir Gyrd's tenement plot") (DN V, 588, 603). Although such terms entail property, these are not necessarily the tenement plots' proper names (Bull 1922, 185).[2] Hence, such tenement plots should not be considered as eponymous, and consequently I have excluded them from the material.

The source for the tenement plot names is the documents, called diplomas, collected in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* (DN). The diplomas mentioning the tenement plots date primarily from the late-thirteenth to the early sixteenth century, which consequently delimits my discussion to the same period. Bull's (1922, 171–185) account of the occurrences of tenement plot names in the diploma material is relied upon. He presents 69 tenement plots in alphabetical order, with information about when the names are mentioned, along with information about possible owners. For some tenement plots, he includes information from the diplomas about use, buildings on the plot, property transfers, and in some cases, vague location within the town, for instance, by parish affiliation. The names are not identifiable in the archaeological material, making it impossible to place the named tenement plots in the urban topography.

Few diplomas are preserved from the early thirteenth century or earlier. However, the number increases in the late-thirteenth century and especially in

2 See Lorentzen (1952, 64–65) for more on different name types, albeit for medieval Bergen.

the fourteenth, when it became customary not only for the king, but also for regular people, to formalize property transactions (Bagge 1998, 157). Tenement plot names would have been necessary in legal matters, to precisely identify houses and areas (Brattegard 1944, 258). However, the type and amount of information about the different tenement plots in the diplomas varies. There is, for instance, information about tenement plots being rented out (DN V, 909), divided (DN V, 900), or sold, sometimes including value (DN II, 220; III, 131). Size of the plot can be accounted for (DN V, 909), or agreement about division of property within the tenement plot, even of parts of the same building (DN IV, 283). Other diplomas recount people staying at the tenement plot, for instance, during illness (DN III, 146), or special functions of the tenement plot, such as Bjarnegård, which was used for council meetings (DN III, 165).[3]

Source-Critical Issues

Having accounted for the type of information provided by the diplomas, I now turn to some source-critical issues. The diplomas' representativeness is limited both by which documents that happen to be preserved and whether a tenement plot was mentioned at all. Since it is known that some changed names (DN V, 900), a tenement plot mentioned by one name in one diploma could, in theory, be mentioned by another name in a later diploma. And, conversely, we cannot know for certain that all reoccurring names represent the same tenement plots. Hypothetically, new tenement plots could be established with the same name as an earlier tenement plot but named after another individual.

Personal names do have a chronology, but this chronology is too coarse to be of use for evaluating whether tenement plot names can be older than their first occurrence in the diplomas. Old, Nordic (Germanic) names were almost exclusive until the eleventh century. Christian names were used from the eleventh century, with saints' names from the earliest period and biblical names gaining popularity primarily after the Reformation. German names occur frequently from the fourteenth century onwards (Schmidt 2002, 89–90).

Moreover, Rygh (1898, 38–40) points out that we might not fully understand the meaning behind all names, especially considering the modification of meaning emerging from name compositions. This is relevant for names that include comparisons, for instance, with tools, weapons, an item of clothing, or a body part – or from praising or disparaging names. Such names can lead to

3 "radæsmannæ hussæt j Bierna gardde j Oslo."

scholars disagreeing over the meaning (Brattegard 1944; cf. Espeland 1929). Few eponymous tenement plots are liable to be misunderstood, however, although there are examples, such as Einarsgård in Bergen, which German traders took to mean unicorn (Brattegard 1944, 270–1).

The archaeological material used is from the Søndre felt and Mindets tomt excavation sites from the mid-1970s. These have been selected for two reasons: 1) together, these sites make up a continuous area of approximately 1000 m^2, with a high number of excavated buildings in a central part of medieval Oslo (Fig. 1), and 2) the material from the sites has been extensively investigated and analyzed (particularly by Schia 1987e), facilitating its use in the discussion. Forthcoming results from the recent excavations related to the Follo Line Project 2013–18 will undoubtedly allow for expansion of the study, but as the most relevant projects are still in their post-excavation phase, with analyses not yet completed, they have been omitted from the discussion here.

Representativity still presents a source-critical problem in that the two archaeological sites that I focus on only cover a relatively small part of medieval Oslo (Schia 1987a, 9). Furthermore, the development of the plot structure at Søndre felt and Mindets tomt is different from recently excavated sites in Oslo, with these recent sites having significantly fewer site periods and comparatively few traces of town fires (Nordlie, Haavik, and Hegdal 2020; Edman, Hegdal, and Haavik [forthcoming]). The topography was important for how the settlement developed (Nedkvitne and Norseng 2000, 44); the tenement plots excavated in the two sites dealt with lay on the flat top of a northeast–southwest-running ridge (see Fig. 1), while the recent sites from the Follo Line Project lay in a gradual slope towards the docks in the west. Despite the caveat of limited representability, the thorough analyses done on the material from Søndre felt and Mindets tomt arguably justifies their use in my discussion.

Approach to the Material

There is no direct correlation between excavated tenement plots and the names known from the diplomas. While in Bergen several names are retained until the present day (Helle 1982, 227), only one such example exists in Oslo: Saxegården (Bull 1922, 180), and this tenement plot is in the southern part of town. The location of a few tenement plots is indicated in the diplomas, for instance, Olbjørnsgård (DN V, 853), which lay west of St. Mary Church (A. in Fig. 1), in the southern part of the town. Others are indicated by a relative location, for instance, Brandsgård and Vidarsgård, which lay next to one another (DN II, 25) somewhere in the parish of

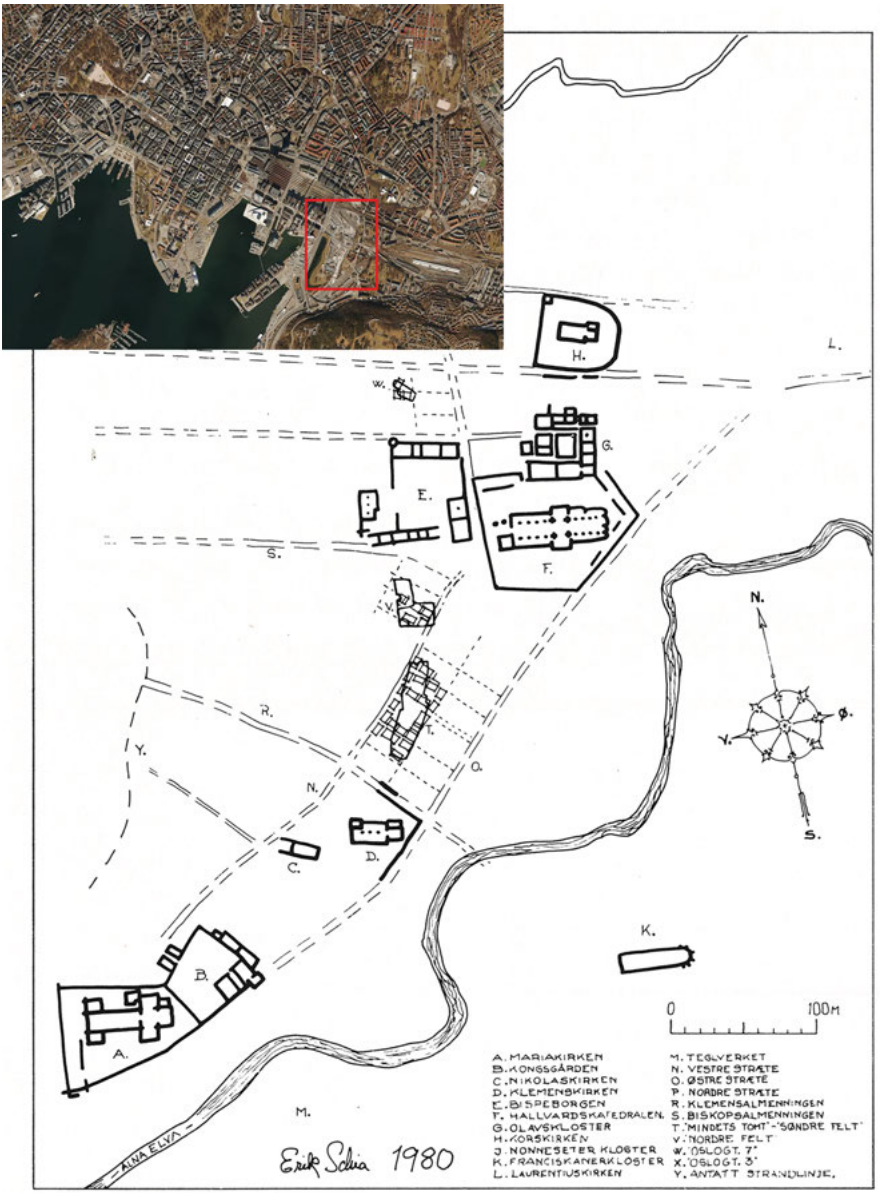

Fig. 1: Map showing the location of Søndre felt and Mindets tomt (T.) in the central part of medieval Oslo (Schia 1987b, fig. 15). The location of medieval Oslo within modern-day Oslo is shown in the aerial photograph in the top left corner. The tenement plot boundaries outside Søndre felt and Mindets tomt are indicated, although this relies on speculation. Note that the western boundary of the tenement plots is limited by a street (N. Vestre strete), while the eastern

the Church of the Holy Cross (DN V, 648; H. in Fig. 1).[4] In comparison, the tenement plots at Bryggen in Bergen are mentioned in the diplomas frequently enough to allow them to be placed in a relatively certain internal order (Helle 1982, 227). A similar exercise for medieval Oslo's topography is not possible (Sæther 1987, 24), although attempts have been made (Fig. 2).

Since the precise location of the tenement plots mentioned in the diplomas is unknown, the comparison here of the excavated tenement plots at Søndre felt and Mindets tomt with eponymous tenement plots in the diplomas is done on an abstract level. Still, by correlating changes visible in the archaeological material with the time of appearance or disappearance of names in the diplomas, it is possible to test my hypothesis regarding reasons for naming and renaming a tenement plot.

Specifically, the years when names appear and disappear will be correlated with four well-documented town fires, in 1223, 1352, 1453/56, and 1523. From 1137 to 1624, the written sources account for 13 fires in Oslo (Sæther 1987, 23). I have selected the four specific town fires for three reasons: 1) all four fires are visible in the archaeological material from Søndre felt and Mindets tomt (Sæther 1987, 37), making Schia's (1987c; 1987d) analyses of tenement plot structure and development relevant when discussing changes after town fires; 2) the fires correspond with the time span that the diploma material covers; and 3) the fires caused significant destruction, increasing the likelihood that the fires' effects are indirectly visible in the diplomas by the appearance or disappearance of tenement plot names.

The other nine fires[5] are excluded since their extent is uncertain, meaning that they cannot be assumed to have had significant impact on the urban topography. Some of them cannot be identified in the archaeological material from Søndre felt and Mindets tomt (Sæther 1987, 37). Furthermore, the two earliest and

Fig. 1 (continued)
boundary is marked halfway to another street (O. Østre strete). Whether some of the tenement plot extended all the way to Østre strete cannot be established without further excavation in the area. The two excavation sites together covered approximately 1000 m^2 (*Schia 1987b*, 9, fig. 15). Nordre felt (V.) was excavated in the 1980s but the results are still unpublished. Aerial photograph: norgeibilder.no (Kartverket, NIBIO, and Statens vegvesen). Norge i bilder, Oslo kommune 2019, owner Oslo municipality (Oslo kommune). Map by Erik Schia. Reproduced with the permission of The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage (Riksantikvaren).

4 Note that this should indicate a location in the northern half of the town (cf. Fig. 2), as the Church of the Holy Cross lay north of the cathedral and of St. Olaf's monastery.
5 In the years 1137, 1159, 1254, 1287, 1379, 1515, 1567, 1611, and 1624.

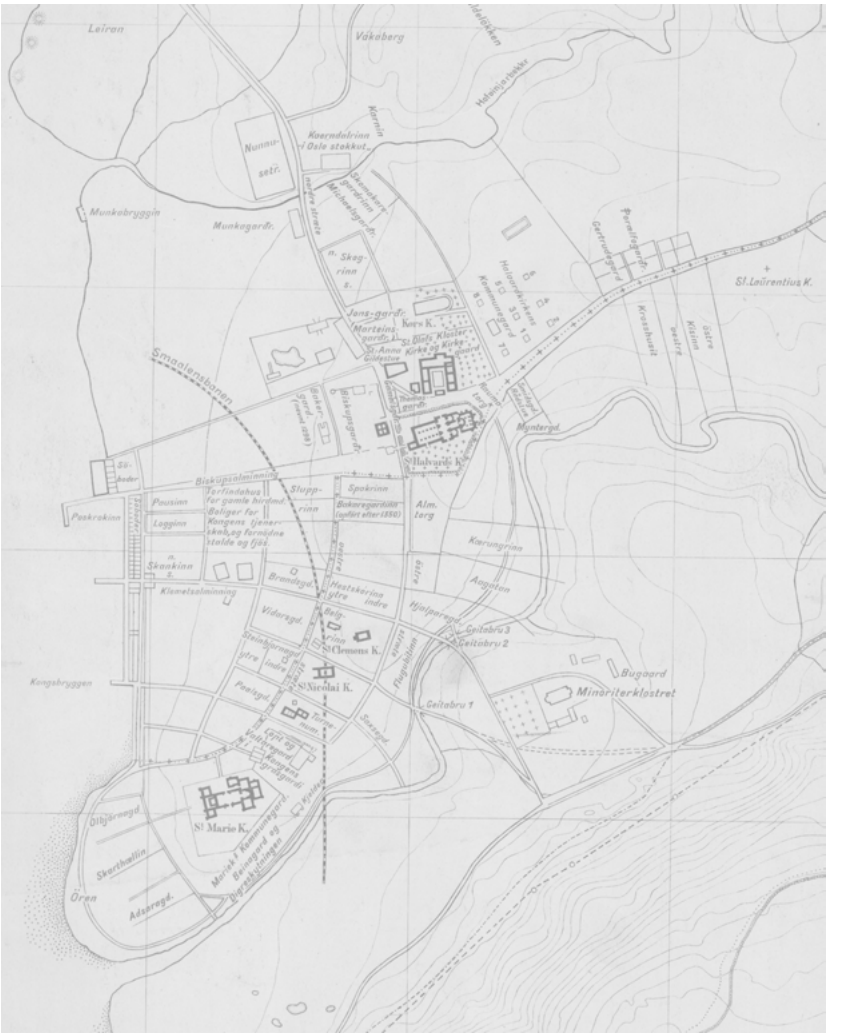

Fig. 2: Cropped version of Colonel N. M. Widerberg's map called "Kristiania amt nr. 93" in "Katalog over Norges Geografiske Opmålings Norske Landkartsamling." The map supposedly shows Oslo with surroundings in the Middle Ages *c.* 1300–1500: "Oslo med nærmeste omgivelser i middelalderen fra ca. 1300–1500. Utarbeidet efter ældre karter og skriftlige optegnelser av oberst N. M. Widerberg 1923." Widerberg has used information from diplomas for placing names in different parts of the medieval town plan. Although some locations may be correct, archaeological excavations cannot confirm the information. Also note that Brandsgård and Vidarsgård, which Widerberg has placed in the middle of town, probably lay in the northern part of town, due to their connection to the parish of the Church of the Holy Cross (DN V, 648). Reproduced with the permission of Kartverket (Norges Geografiske Oppmåling): 93–1, ob. N. M. Widerberg, 1923; license CC BY 4.0.

the three latest fires fall outside of the period when the eponymous tenement plots are mentioned in the diplomas, making comparison impossible.

The Black Death ravaged Oslo in the mid-fourteenth century. Due to the relative closeness of the time of the plague and the town-wide fire in 1352, it is challenging to distinguish between changes following one or the other of these two significant events. Still, I will return to the Black Death towards the end of my discussion.

Self-expression Versus Practical Function of Eponymous Tenement Plots

Before proceeding with a discussion about self-expression, an obvious question regarding the tenement plot names must be addressed: Were they not simply practical markers in the urban topography? Place names enable us to orient in the landscape. Without them, trying to describe even a simple trip would be laborious (Strid 1993, 11).

To be useful as markers in the urban topography, tenement plot names needed to be well known, and this would require that they lasted for some time. Some of Oslo's tenement plot names were indeed durable; 26 of them are mentioned in diplomas more than a century apart, and 4 of them more than two centuries apart. Furthermore, it is highly likely that many tenement plots are older than their earliest occurrence in the preserved diplomas. For Bergen, several plot names can be traced back further than the time of the diplomas when they are first mentioned, either by being mentioned in older sagas or by references in the diplomas to events that happened earlier than the date of the diplomas in question.

Tenement plot names can be traced back at least to the second half of the twelfth century (Lorentzen 1952, 64–5). The extensive period in which some names occur in the diplomas eliminates the possibility that all tenement plots were named after each current owner, as this would limit the time a name occurred to a human life span. Thus, it is meaningful to see the act of naming a tenement plot as separate from the continual use of the name. It is possible that the name meant something different to town-dwellers contemporary to the person the tenement plot was named after than to later generations.

Names can occur in different ways, either spontaneously or as a longer process (Strid 1993, 26). Most agrarian farm names are results of a lexicalization process based on a description of the object being named (Helleland 2002, 49). The prototypic Nordic place name is a proprialized terrain appellative, sometimes

combined with a modifier or clarification (Helleland 2002, 49). Agrarian farm names are dealt with much more extensively than names in medieval towns (Rygh 1897; Olsen 1967, 1971; Schmidt 2000). Relatively few new agrarian farm names appeared in the period from the mid-fourteenth century to the end of the fifteenth century (Schmidt 2003, 72). During the same period, however, many new tenement plot names appeared in Oslo. This is natural, for two reasons: firstly, due to expansion and densification of the town, and secondly, due to a continuous need for marking identity and property in a developing town.

Based on my own review of tenement plot names in the diploma material, I noticed a pronounced overweight of *-gård* names in medieval Oslo, compared to agrarian farms with names ending, for example, in *-heim* or *-stad* or other suffixes. In Oslo, there are no known *-stad* names, and only one ending in *-heim*: Skinheimen. The chronology of name suffixes is relevant here, as most *-gård/gard* names, both urban and rural, date to the medieval period, likely due to the settlement expansion from the Viking Age to the middle of the fourteenth century (NSL 1997).

Still, I propose that the need to define and demarcate tenement plots in an urban context could be the reason for the prevalence of *-gård* names in Oslo. The eponymous tenement plots primarily end with *-gård*, in the meaning of *bygård* (see definition above). While *gård* translates to farm, it originally meant "fence" or "fenced area" (NSL 1997). A *gård* was an individual landed property or an economic unit, with the latter meaning explaining why it was used for urban tenement plots (Hovda 1960, 191–2). Still, the original meaning should be stressed; in densely populated areas, like a medieval town, the physical boundary between private and public space was more important than in rural areas. Plot boundaries are commonly found in archaeological excavations, often as fences or drainage ditches. The latter not only functioned as drainage, but also to define the plot (Wienberg 1992, 98–9). The consistent use of the ending *-gård* could thus demonstrate the need to demarcate property of urban tenement plots.

Having discussed the importance of demarcating the boundary of tenement plots, I can return to the question of self-expression. Giving urban tenement plots characteristic names was a practice which originated in twelfth-century Germany, when citizens gradually gained wealth and power (Brattegard 1944, 257). Reasonably, the tradition spread to other towns and countries, and the earliest known named tenement plots from Norway are from the second half of the twelfth century (Lorentzen 1952, 64–5). How the tenement plots were identified in the earliest phase of the Norwegian towns is unknown, but considering the commercial revolution in the high medieval period, which included the

citizens (Helle et al. 2006, 80–6), it is likely that their increased wealth and power allowed them to name tenement plots in Norway, as in Germany.

Essential when discussing self-expression is whether a person named the tenement plot him- or herself. However, if it was implied that a tenement plot would be named after any person who built there, self-expression was just as much in the act of building, as the given name would be the same, regardless. Any disparaging or mocking names were likely not given by the person him- or herself, though I have found no such names among the eponymous tenement plots in Oslo.

Presumably, having a tenement plot named after oneself would entail a certain element of status. Status can be connected to the size of the plots or the types of buildings on it. For instance, we could expect stone buildings as part of the eponymous tenement plots if demonstration of status was a motive, as these buildings required large amounts of resources. Recent excavation results (for instance, Edman, Hegdal, and Haavik [forthcoming]; Berge and Ødeby et al. [forthcoming]) suggest that several of the stone buildings mentioned in the diplomas were built in the late-thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The diplomas explicitly account for one or more stone buildings or cellars in twelve tenement plots.[6] Because only half of these tenement plots are eponymous, it suggests there is no correspondence between the stone buildings and the eponymous tenement plots. Perhaps wealthy town-dwellers had less need for self-expression through the tenement plot name as they might have alternative ways of asserting themselves, compared to less wealthy town-dwellers. A name such as Hjalparegård (DN II, 495), named after "the savior," Jesus Christ, even suggests a motive of piety, in contradiction to self-assertion. While the type of name could conceivably follow from a tenement plot's function, I have not found a convincing pattern supporting this.

We cannot know how the tenement plot names were perceived by other town dwellers. The names, even after a short period of familiarization after they were given or changed, might primarily have been an aid for navigating the urban topography. Still, they were likely also perceived as marking private property, especially when combined with physical boundaries such as fences.

6 Stige and Bauer 2018, 6, 79. Brandsgård (DN III, 134), Bjarnegård (DN I, 216; III, 138), Olbjørnsgård (DN IX, 128), Belgen (DN IV, 352), which includes two cellars (DN II, 481; VI, 306), Skogen (DN IV, 355), Kjærungen (DN II, 322), Agaten (DN III, 435), Hjalparegård (DN II, 495), Smidsgård (DN IV, 557), Skarthælen (DN IV, 759), Ossursgård (DN V, 678), and Blesusgård (DN V, 900). In addition, there was likely a stone building in the tenement plot called Turnen, as this means "the tower" (DN III, 87; Ekroll 1990, 8).

Change and Development of Tenement Plots and Their Names

A premise for this discussion is that certain changes in the tenement plots were significant enough to warrant a new name. Changes in tenement plots are confirmed both by archaeology (Schia 1987c) and the diplomas (for example, DN II, 25; IV, 601; V, 1021; Nedkvitne and Norseng 2000). Still, of the two source types, archaeological material is the most applicable for identifying change and development of tenement plots.

With the use of archaeological material from Mindets tomt and Søndre felt, Schia (1987c, 180, fig. 188) presents the building density in the different site phases (Fig. 3). Based on changes in density, he divides the excavation sites into four main periods. There is a convincing correlation between changes in density and three of the four town fires that are examined in the next section. This entails that significant changes occurred after a fire, presumably connected with restructuring of buildings within the tenement plots – perhaps even changes in different properties. Presumably, town fires were good occasions to make more space for people in a growing town. Still, a change in building density alone does not necessarily entail a change in the tenement plots or their names. Increasing density could simply mean that a tenement plot developed, with few or small buildings being replaced by more or larger buildings. It is, however, possible that the changes in building density occurred when a new owner took over and established or developed a new tenement plot. This is especially likely if the takeover happened after a fire had destroyed most of the buildings.

In the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth century, in parallel with the densification of old plots, Oslo was expanded northwards, past the bishop's palace, and south and east, past the Alna river (Nedkvitne and Norseng 2000, 95–6), towards the ridge called Ekeberg / Eikaberg. New tenement plot names might be connected to new plots and building activities in these areas. From the way it is mentioned, Ossursgård, for instance, may have lain close to the Alna river, probably on the opposite side of the town proper, as a diploma states that Ossur Jonsson received a plot close to Eikaberg – "upp med Æika bærk" (DN I, 92) – southeast of town. However, no archaeological investigations have located tenement plots on the southern side of the river (DN V, 678; Nedkvitne and Norseng 2000, 95).

Compared to building density, changes in boundaries between tenement plots might be a stronger indicator for the naming of new tenement plots. From the two sites, there are archaeological traces of such changes (Schia 1987b, Fig. 8). The changes were more pronounced in the early history of the area, especially up to

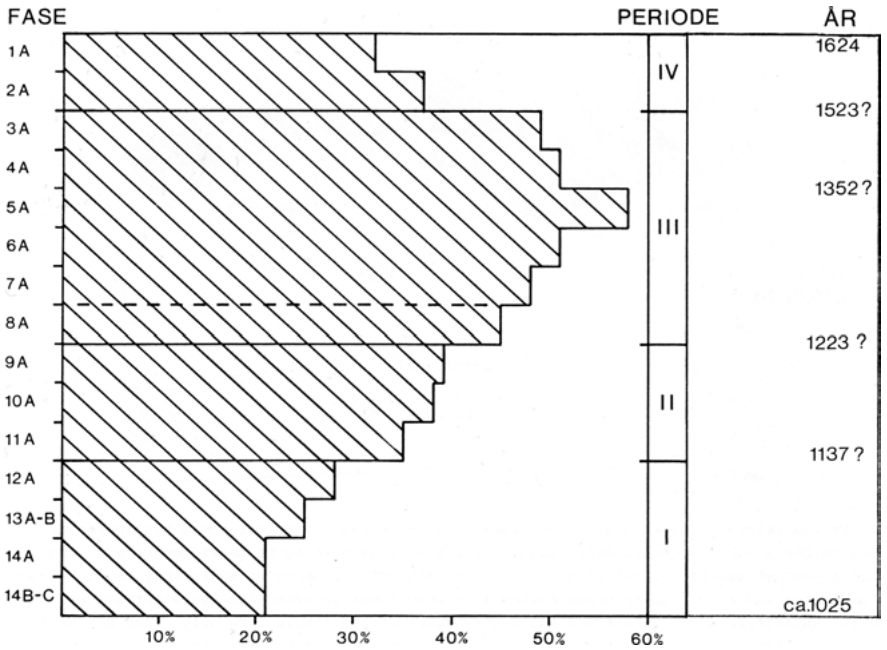

Fig. 3: Histogram of building density in 14 different phases in Mindets tomt and Søndre felt. These 14 phases (left column, marked "FASE") are what Schia (1987c, 180) calls a-phases, which represent the situation distinguishable after the whole area was destroyed by fire. Consequently, these phases present a complete image of the tenement plots in the area. Based on the building density, the 14 phases are placed in four main site periods (I–IV, thin column marked "*PERIODE*"). To the right in the histogram are the years ("*ÅR*") of some of the fires known from written sources. These correspond to significant changes in the building density which justifies the division of the sites into periods. Figure by Erik Schia. Reproduced with the permission of The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage (Riksantikvaren).

and including phase 8 (see Fig. 4), i.e., in a period from when we scarcely have any diplomas preserved. Phase 8 may represent changes following the 1223 fire (see below). However, in the early thirteenth century, one of the tenement plots seems to disappear. This corresponds to a process of gradual increase of tenement plot width throughout the four main site periods (Schia 1992, 152).

Still, stability in boundaries between tenement plots in the thirteenth to sixteenth century should not be considered as hard evidence for name continuation, as it is only natural that plot boundaries were important to uphold considering the right of use – the *dominium utile* – of the tenement plots. It is very unlikely that transfer of the right of use from one person to another would entail infringement on neighboring tenement plots. It is more reasonable to imagine plots changing,

albeit to small extents, after fires which obliterated buildings and boundary markers. Such small changes are visible in Fig. 4, either by water-channels or fluctuating boundaries between buildings on either plot. As I will argue in the coming paragraphs, even changes which did not leave physical marks in the urban topography could require new names for tenement plots.

While the physical plot boundaries are often visible in the archaeological material, property boundaries might not be. Tenement plots could be sub-divided into smaller properties, but we do not know if such sub-division would leave physical traces (Schia 1992, 151, 153). Furthermore, we cannot know whether sub-division of the tenement plots, which started in the late-eleventh century (Schia 1992, 154), entailed renaming, or whether a tenement plot's name was more firmly connected to the physical plot of land, regardless of how many properties it contained. The significant relationship between property and tenement plots is shown in the town law of Magnus the Lawmender (Magnús *lagabætir*) from 1276, which says that those who owned or rented a whole, a half, or a quarter of a tenement plot could attend the town meeting (Robberstad and Taranger 1923, 48). It seems unreasonable that there would be a separate name for each of the properties in a sub-divided tenement plot, especially if the boundaries between the properties were not visible.

Turning to accounts of changing tenement plots in the diplomas, one example is Skadden (albeit not eponymous), which was divided along the tenement plot's long axis in a southern and northern part (DN V, 1021). Furthermore, when half of Blesusgård changed hands, this part was thereafter called *søndre* (southern) Lassegård (DN V, 900). Tenement plots divided in this way were possibly *dobbeltgårder* ("double tenement plots"), consisting of two rows of buildings, one on each side of a narrow passage (Helle 1982, 222). Regardless of the original layout of the tenement plots, they could be divided on different axes. This could lead to names like northern or southern, as mentioned above, or *øvre* and *nedre*, meaning "upper" and "lower," which also occur in the diplomas (DN II, 495; Schia 1987b, 197, 199). While significant for the tenants, such modifiers are rarely visible archaeologically.

What these kinds of modifiers say about self-expression is not clear. However, I propose that certain forms of division would *require* renaming of tenement plots, either with a new proper name or with a modifier, like those mentioned above. The boundaries of a plot could be defined by different elements, for instance, streets, docks, cemeteries, ditches, or fences (Schia 1987b, 201; 1992, 152). If a tenement plot occupied the entire area between two streets, or between boundaries like the docks or cemeteries, the tenement plot would have had a façade towards an important landmark. In such cases, it is reasonable to imagine the tenement plot as a marker in the urban topography, with a specified location, for instance, "south of the bishop's dock" or "on the corner of Western Street and St.

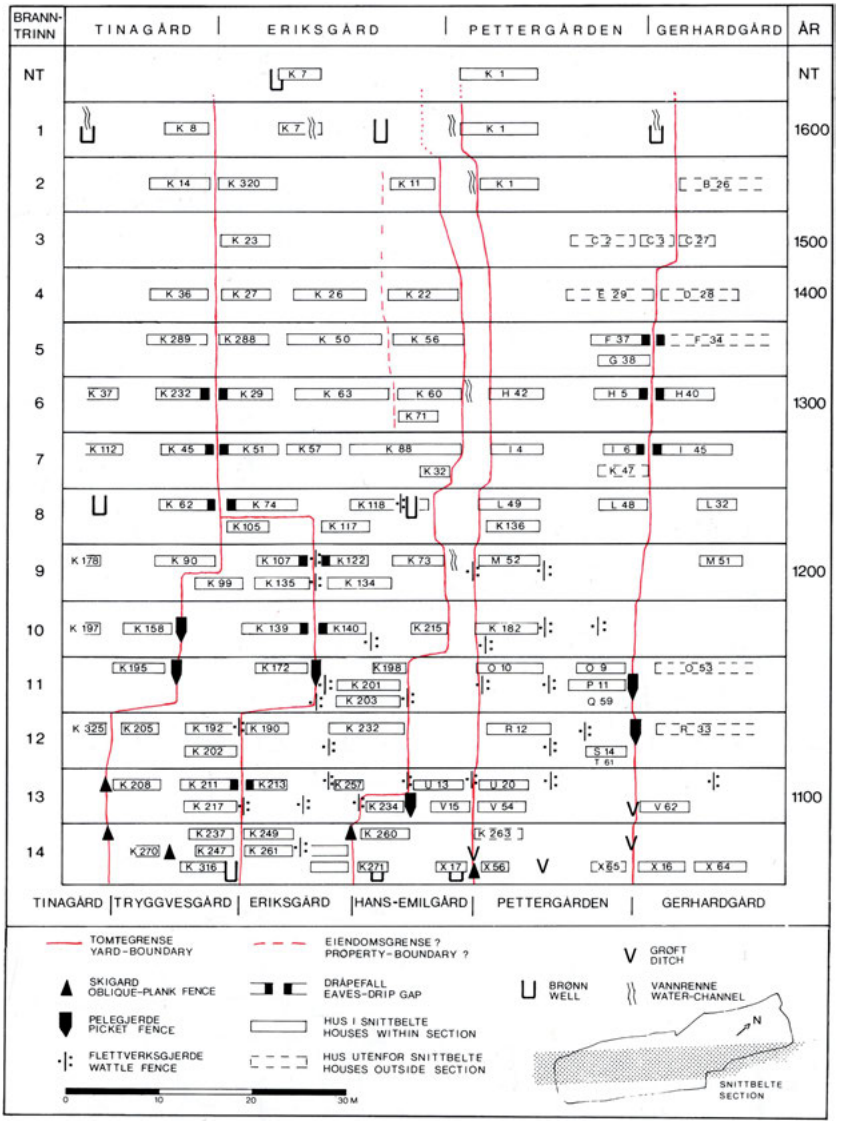

Fig. 4: Schematic section through the excavation sites Mindets tomt and Søndre felt, with fire sequences in the left-hand column (marked "*BRANNTRINN*") and calendar years in the right-hand column (marked "*ÅR*"; "*NT*" entails recent times). Buildings, wells, drainage ditches, and fences are projected to a vertical plan. Interpreted tenement plot boundaries are demarcated by red lines (*Schia 1987c*, fig. 8). Note that the tenement plot names in this figure are fictitious; they are the names of archaeologists and are thus not mentioned in any diploma. Figure by Erik Schia. Reproduced with the permission of The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage (Riksantikvaren).

Clement's Street." If a tenement plot in such a location was divided, especially if it was divided across its long axis, the façade towards the boundary on either side would subsequently belong to a tenement plot with a new extent. This would reasonably require renaming of one or both tenement plots to maintain efficient navigation in the town. Presumably, a new name could also be required if the tenement plot was divided *along* its long axis, as this would entail two narrow façades next to one another, belonging to two different tenement plots, where there previously had been a single broad tenement plot façade. In such cases, the need for orienting would eventually make the town dwellers forget the name of old tenement plots (cf. Van Dyke and Alcock 2003, 3).

Name-giving and creation of physical boundaries are two different methods of claiming space and communicating it to the rest of the population. While the latter is important for the right of use, the former would contain an additional element of allowing accentuation of oneself in the urban topography. For effective navigation in an increasingly densely settled town, one would be required to know that specific tenement plots lie in specific areas. At first, the name would probably be associated with the person who named it. Gradually, however, the names were likely used in the language of the town-dwellers as a place name with purely a practical, topographical significance. Thus, it seems that relatively brief episodes of self-expression cast long chronological shadows on the urban landscape. Still, another type of self-expression might be relevant when considering the long life of certain tenement plots, namely, that of descendants associating themselves with the relative that the plot was named after – be that a parent or a more distant relative.

The Town Fires' Effect on the Tenement Plots and Their Names

Town fires certainly affected the urban topography and the town-dwellers. The four town fires in 1223, 1352, 1453/56, and 1523 were all significant and likely caused massive changes to the townscape. Disappearing or reoccurring names can of course be attributed to random survival of documents. Still, a high number of disappearances likely signifies large changes in the town (Sæther 1987, 29). The 1352 fire is supposed to have devastated the whole town except the buildings on the docks (NGL IV, 489). Bull (1922, 257) suggests that this fire rearranged the urban topography completely. Changes from such large fires are visible in the archaeological material from Mindets tomt and Søndre felt, where the changes especially from phase 6a to 4a (see Fig. 3) are significant (Schia 1987c, figs. 14–16).

Several tenement plots are only mentioned before or after the 1352 fire, and the same applies to the 1453/56 fire a century later (Bull 1922, 171). On the other hand, a significant number of tenement plot names show continuity through both these fires. Sæther (1987, 29) argues that disappearing names do not necessarily mean that the tenement plots disappeared completely, but rather that a new tenant named it. Such a change in tradition indicates a break of some kind, for instance, that a new person occupied and rebuilt a plot after a fire. Sæther furthermore argues that we should expect a waiting period after a tenement plot was built or obtained a new name before it appears in the written sources. I disagree with this premise; if a new name was given, it would have been necessary to refer to it, especially in legal matters, regardless of when these occurred.

Bull (1922, 171) focuses on changes before or after the 1352 and 1453/56 fires, but looking at the occurrence of eponymous tenement plot names in the diplomas, it seems that the 1523 fire is the most prominent, as eleven eponymous tenement plot names disappeared within a period of approximately 50 years before this fire (Bjarnegård, Mikkelsgård, Halvardsgård, Gjertrudsgård, Lassegård, Pausen, Smidsgård, Thorelvagård, Tomasgård, Toragård, and Vidarsgård). The buildings in phase 3a at Mindets tomt / Søndre felt were probably destroyed in this fire (Schia 1987b, 70–2).

According to written sources (NGL IV, 489; DN IV, 601), the 1352 fire was one of the most destructive in the town's medieval history. Still, only three eponymous tenement plots (Beinegård, Gullinn, and Miksgård) disappear from the sources a short time prior to the fire. Four names (Gjertrudsgård, Haraldsgård, Ossursgård, and Pålsgård) appear during a period of approximately 50 years after this fire. The buildings in phase 5a at Mindets tomt / Søndre felt were probably destroyed in the 1352 fire (Schia 1987b, 79–83).

Kyrningen is mentioned from 1310 to January 6, 1453 (DN II, 798), and despite that the date of the 1453/56 fire is unknown, it is reasonable to assume that Kyrningen disappeared with this fire, as the tenement plot is mentioned so early in 1453 (the diplomas is dated January 6th), and not later. Ossursgård also disappeared prior to this fire, 15–18 years before. The building remains in Phase 4a at Mindets tomt / Søndre felt were possibly destroyed in this fire. However, the archaeological remains provide an incomplete image of the settlement structure in this phase (Schia 1987b, 73–9).

No diplomas mentioning Oslo's tenement plots, eponymous or otherwise, predate the 1223 fire, and only one appears shortly thereafter: Håkonsgård in 1226. This says less about the consequences of the fire and more about the scarce diploma material in the early thirteenth century. The buildings in phase 9a at Mindets tomt / Søndre felt were probably destroyed in this fire (Schia 1987b, 104–11).

Considering that so many eponymous tenement plots show continuity through one or more fires, I propose that if a tenement plot was traceable after a fire, either by still-standing buildings or by physical connection to boundaries like streets, the names would generally be kept. Due to the many fires in Oslo, along with inexorable degradation of timber, the buildings standing on the plots cannot have survived for as long as some of the tenement plot names occur, which in some cases were for more than two centuries. If buildings were replaced one by one, the tenement plot was probably perceived as the same unit.

Moreover, there might have been buildings of such significance that the tenement plot name remained, even if the rest of the buildings were destroyed by fire or gradually replaced. Stone buildings might have held such significance. Indeed, most of the tenement plots with stone buildings are mentioned both prior to and after the 1352 fire. The average time span of occurrences of tenement plots which contained one or more stone buildings is 136 years. Of the eponymous tenement plots with stone buildings, the average time span is similar: 140 years. Dating of excavated stone buildings show that these constructions had an even longer period of use – around 200 years or more (Edman, Hegdal, and Haavik [forthcoming]). These lasting buildings thus dictated the development, or rather lack thereof, of the tenement plot – probably even nearby infrastructure – for centuries.

Consequently, most plots with stone buildings must have survived the original builder, and this suggests that if a known landmark, in this case a tenement plot with a stone building, still stood, names could be kept.

Change after the Black Death?

The Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century was a disastrous event, where at least half of Oslo's population died (Nedkvitne and Norseng 2000, 338). At first glance, one would expect this to leave a clear mark both in the archaeology and in the tenement plot names.

Archaeological traces of the Black Death in Oslo are hard to identify, although an area of deserted buildings lying south of where Bishop's Street met the docks might indicate an aftermath of the epidemic (Nordlie, Haavik, and Hegdal 2020).

When it comes to tenement plot names, three (Gullin, Miksgård, and Beinegård) disappear 5–22 years prior to the plague, and three (Ossursgård, Haraldsgård, and Gjertrudsgård) appear 7–21 years after the main period of the plague's ravages. Still, 19 out of the 38 eponymous tenement plots are mentioned in the diplomas both prior to and after the plague. This demonstrates that there was no clear correlation between the plague and new tenement plot

names. This supports the idea that tenement plot names were less connected to the current dweller, and more to the physical buildings.

The closeness in time between the 1352 fire and the Black Death entails that the same 19 tenement plots that were mentioned prior to and after the plague also were mentioned prior to and after the 1352 fire. Thus, it is difficult to ascribe changes to one or the other of these events. However, the marked reduction in building density at Søndre felt and Mindets tomt at this time (Fig. 3) suggests that even though the fire caused a rearrangement of the tenement plot structure in the area, the population reduction removed the need for additional settlement densification in the succeeding centuries.

Summary and Conclusions: To Rename or Not to Rename – Self-expression or Practical Function?

Both archaeological material and diplomas demonstrate changes in the urban topography. Source-critical aspects make my conclusions uncertain, but as additional sites are added from the large-scale excavations from the Follo Line Project, the same methodology can be applied to this material. This will create an increasingly fine-meshed image of tenement plot development in different parts of medieval Oslo.

The duration of several names in the diplomas illustrates that they were used long after the person who originally built on the property had died. On the other hand, after large-scale fires, when presumably whole tenement plots burned to the ground, with boundaries obliterated, some would be renamed after a new person built there. This process could entail an adjusted plot boundary, although in the period focused on – the thirteenth to the sixteenth century – archaeological material from Mindets tomt and Søndre felt shows that such adjustments were relatively small, even though the composition of buildings and their density changed significantly. Still, based on the continuity of several names after significant fires in medieval Oslo, it cannot be argued that tenement plots were simply given new names if they burned. Naturally, we cannot know whether buildings survived a specific fire, but if the owners survived and rebuilt the plot, there is no reason to expect a name change – especially not to another eponym.

Initially, I presented a hypothesis regarding eponymous tenement plots. My consideration of the archaeological and written material leads me to the following conclusions: eponymous tenement plots could represent the person who built on a plot, provided there were no significant landmarks on the plot which would make renaming impractical and thus preventing new names from being

accepted and conventionalized in the population. The high number of new occurrences of eponymous tenement plots in the late-thirteenth to early fourteenth century could at first glance be interpreted as representing increased townd-weller status and autonomy – with accompanying opportunities for self-expression. Status increase is especially relevant when considering the growth of stone buildings in Oslo at that time. However, considering Oslo's geographical expansion during the same period, the new names could simply be a consequence of new tenement plots being establishing in newly allotted areas, for instance, north of the bishop's palace or on the opposite side of the Alna river. Such expansion would require new tenement plot names to efficiently navigate the new neighborhoods. Still, tenement plots in established parts of town might also be given new names if property changes caused new tenants to occupy tenement plots facing important thoroughfares like communal streets or docks.

A degree of self-expression is clearly related to naming. But what does this say about the individuals and the urban population as a whole? While we cannot know how having a tenement plot named after oneself felt for the medieval tenant, we can presume a degree of pride. Still, this kind of self-expression was more relevant for the public perception than the tenant's inner self. The population undoubtedly needed tenement plot names and physical structures to mark their property and recognize others. This was essential both for navigating the townscape and for legal matters. As Van Dyke and Alcock (2003, 3) argue, the needs of the present cause people to remember or forget. Thus, it is reasonable that names were kept if they were still useful and if continuity was desired. If new ownership needed to be claimed and communicated to the rest of the urban population, either for personal or practical reasons, presumably a new name was given. As argued here, the type of buildings on the tenement plots and their physical relation to other landmarks could possibly limit potential renaming. Such limitation probably became stronger after a name's conventionalization and its gradual transition from association with the person behind the eponym to a place name with a mainly practical, topographical significance.

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Searching for the Self in Danish Twelfth-Century Churches: A Praxeological Experiment

Abstract: This article elicits statements about the medieval self from the Danish rural churches. It explores one ubiquitous style-making motif in Romanesque church architecture, namely the round arch. This "commonplace motif" is fused with practice theory to show how meaning-making arise in interplay between ritual practices, practitioners, and the churches' visual articulation. The article suggests that it is possible to explore aspects of perception by the participating self, but not the self as a traditional subject-based entity through this combined approach. The underlying objective of the article is to explore the twelfth-century churches from a non-conventional approach.

Keywords: Sunday mass, praxeology, ritual, liturgy, visual rhetoric

This article is, in essence, a methodological and theoretical experiment. It explores the limits of what can reasonably be said about the medieval self[1] based on the rural churches of twelfth-century Denmark. Traditionally, these churches have been viewed as mute and thus redundant in relation to questions of medieval selfhood, cognition, and perception. The primary concern is, then, how we can get these buildings to talk, and to that, if and how they might testify to a notion of the medieval self. Conventional, discipline-specific approaches have proven to be insufficient in this regard. As such, the following article is an attempt at fusing different branches of current theories from the humanities and the social sciences in an effort to explore otherwise inaccessible information. More simply put: What did the visual articulation of twelfth-century churches *intend*? How were they used? And, might this intent and ritual usage inform us of aspects of the medieval self? In order to explore these questions, it will be useful to suggest a hypothesis to drive the discussion throughout the article. The working hypothesis to be tested on the material is thus: meaning-making

1 For a discussion of the concept of the self in the scholarly tradition, see the introduction to the present volume.

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arises in the interplay between ritual practices, practitioners, and the churches' visual articulation.

In the article that follows, the twelfth-century Danish churches will first be presented from a non-conventional point of view. One ubiquitous visual articulation will be adressed, namely the round arch or the round-arched arcade. This motif is traditionally taken to be no more than a trite stylistic idiom. Contrary to the formalistic art-historical dismissal of this motif as devoid of meaning, the contention here is that this "commonplace motif" is in fact intended as *visual rhetoric*. The visual rhetoric is, in turn, activated and conditioned by the ritual practices unfolding both outside and inside the church building. As such, the commonplace motif is partaking in the meaning-making on the exact same terms as the individual practitioner or worshipper, if you will. In order to explain what is meant by all this, the twelfth-century rural church building, its physiognomy, and its usage will initially be characterized. By taking Sunday Mass as an illustrative example, the aim is to "activate" the physical remnants. The church's visual articulation will thus be juxtaposed with what we know of the ritual practices from the medieval Mass expositions (*Messuskýringar* 1962; *Messuskýringar* 2014). Having activated the church space(s), the article will then return to the above-mentioned questions of the medieval self and embark upon the theoretical and methodological experiment proper.

As the churches are themselves – at first glimpse at least – mute with regards to their medieval users' meaning-making, just as the normativity of the expositions hardly reveals notions of medieval practitioners' perception, it will be useful to introduce a theory from the social sciences that discard the traditional dichotomy between "subject" and "object": namely, the so-called practice theory (see the introduction to the present volume). Generally speaking, this branch of social, cultural theory argues that meaning-making happens in practice only. As such, the material remnants are not merely things or objects to be interpreted by a subject. Instead, the same tacit knowledge is embedded in both subject and object. However, it is only expressed during the performance of the actual practice. The experiment is thus whether such an approach, when combined with commonplace theory, enables us to tease out information from the churches about the medieval self, which is not accessible with conventional discipline-specific methods.

The Implications of Style

The vast corpus of research on the Danish medieval churches was and still is rather conservative, in that it is primarily concerned with formal qualities. Two

strands of classical approaches dominate the field, namely systematic, formalistic art history (that is, "history of style") and iconographical analysis. Consequently, the greater part of publications on the churches are either resonated catalogues and inventories minutely recording and categorizing the architectural features or its furnishings and fittings (quantitative descriptions of the original layout of the building, structural alterations and refurbishing throughout the centuries, spatial organization, typologies, workshops, etc.) or proper iconographic and iconological readings of pictorial programs or single monuments (e.g., wall paintings or sculptural carvings on baptismal fonts or portals).[2] This pioneering bulk of research has contributed immensely to our knowledge of the first generation of stone churches built within the territory of medieval Denmark. It is now known that the vast majority of the more than 3,100 churches built during the long twelfth-century were small, rural churches and that they were generally uniform in their architectural layout and spatial arrangement (Kieffer-Olsen 2018; Wienberg 1993). A typical rural church comprised nave and chancel and was encircled by a cemetery. As shown in the schematic drawings Fig. 1a–c, this so-called two-cell building would have had two entrances: one to the south and one to the north. The church building would have had two or four small round-arched windows in the nave and between one and three windows in the chancel. Inside, the baptismal font was prominently situated on an elevated podium positioned almost at the center of the nave a bit to the west. Along the northern and southern walls ran low stone benches. The chancel arch, flanked by two side altars, provided access into the chancel, which housed the high altar. The building was fairly polychrome, exterior as well as interior. Wall paintings adorned the east wall of the nave and the chancel, while the sculptural details on portals, window openings, and chancel arches were coloured as well. Furnishings such as baptismal fonts and retables displayed decorative and iconographical details (for a more detailed account, see (Bonde [forthcoming])).

The formal analysis is thus vital to our immediate understanding of the physical church building, primarily as the stylistic criteria have been used to date the churches and identify impulses. The iconographical and iconological analyses, on the other hand, propose more or less historically verifiable meanings.[3] However, when enquiring about intent or perception, as methodological tools, formalistic history of style and classical iconography can only go so far.

2 For a literary review, see Jürgensen (2018, 3–29). In recent years, a couple of studies that aim at covering the entirety of the building, its function, and their interrelations have come about. See especially the extremely thorough study of the churches' changing interior (Jürgensen 2018).

3 For the status of this strand of art-historical approach, see Liepe 2018.

Besides, in the scholarly tradition guarding the Danish churches, questions like these have historically been dismissed as merely speculative or even as reductionist (see, e.g., Nyborg 1987). This is quite curious, as the uniformity in the architectural expression across medieval Denmark suggests, as a minimum, a relation between planning, constructing, and using.

In classical, art-historical scholarship, artworks (objects, artifacts, and architecture) are defined as human expressions particular to a historical period, which implies that any given work of art is a visual, tactile, or spatial expression specific to one mind or one culture.[4] As such, the history of style – which has been almost synonymous with art history from its establishment as an academic discipline in the late-eighteenth century and well into the twentieth century[5]– by definition entails a notion of "individuality"; be it individuality of an actual, specific individual, a people, a region, or a period (Wittkower 1973). Yet, the systematic strand of the history of style is extremely tendentious. It is conditioned by a nineteenth-century, formalist praxis of categorization that orders visual material according to a linear notion of progression or evolution of style based on modern connoisseurship. Despite its inherent focus on distinct traits and characteristics, questions of intent, meaning, and reception are rarely addressed as they are, essentially, irrelevant for the purposes of the stylistic exercise. Bluntly put, all visual articulations are in this line of thought tokens of the human "will to create" (Riegl 1893), rendering the exploration of meaning and intent somewhat superfluous. The will to create is understood as subconscious and universal (Gombrich 1979). However, the formalistic history of style has been heavily critiqued at least since the first quarter of the twentieth century and the very concept of style is continuously discussed (see, e.g., Lang 1987 or Pinotti 2012). A less formalistic and more anthropological understanding of the concept of style can be exemplified by the American art historian Meyer

4 This line of thought was cultivated by Giorgio Vasari (†1574) as early as the sixteenth century in his celebrated book *Lives of the Artists* (1550 and 1568) and became especially pronounced in the work of the discipline's founding father, Johan Joachim Winkelmann (†1768), especially in his *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bilhauerkunst* of 1755. Moreover, this cultivation of an art historical canon (that is, a concern with high art determined by the Western academies) occasioned the rise the romanticist conception of the individual genius and the "master piece," a concept that survived well into the twentieth century.

5 Naturally, the discipline of art history has come a long way since it entered academia and a multitude of approaches and questions have been explored since then, slowly extending the boundaries of art history by crossing as well as appropriating theories and methods from neighboring disciplines (see, e.g., Preziosi 2009). In particular, the rise of poststructuralism in art theoretical discourse drew on general turns within the humanities more general: see, e.g., the works of the American art historian Michael Ann Holly, especially (Holly 1996).

Schapiro's celebrated 1953 article "Style": "By style is meant the constant form – and sometimes the constant elements, qualities, and expression – in the art of an individual or group." He elaborates:

> The style is, above all, a system of forms with a quality and a meaningful expression through which the personality of the artist and the broad outlook of a group are visible. It is also a vehicle of expression within the group, communicating and fixing certain values of religious, social, and moral life through the emotional suggestiveness of form . . . The style reflects or projects the "inner form" of collective thinking and feeling.
>
> (Schapiro 1953, 287)

Schapiro's definition of style as "constant form" implies integration of form and meaning. It is understood as a static entity and thus as something to be perceived of or interpreted by a subject. In this way, style becomes an object in its own right. Contrary to the classical iconographic approach of locating *the* specific written (Christian) sources as model behind an image, Schapiro contemplates style as an expression of social and ideological restraints, secular as well as sacred. The style of an object, then, be it a building, a painting, or a sculptural detail reflects an autonomous choice. However, as noted above, in the scholarship on Danish medieval churches, the systematic paradigm still reigns almost supreme. Therefore, this article returns to the visual articulation of the generic, rural church and propose quite a different way to approach its style.

All openings in the early stone churches were round-arched. At least they appear rounded. Many door openings were technically speaking constructed as rectangular openings with a lintel and only crowned by a semi-circular tympanum, which would have the entirety of the opening appear rounded. Therefore, it is crucial to notice that the semi-circular structure of the arch is not only used as a structural component reflective of contemporary know-how. Rather, rounded arches and arcades are frequently deployed as ornamental elaborations of the church building, on the furnishings, and as painted decorations. In fact, the round-arched "structure" or element seems to have been ubiquitous and a constantly repeated feature of this period (see Fig. 2a–e). Its ubiquity has caused the rounded arch to be regarded as *the* stylistic denominator of the so-called Romanesque style. The term Romanesque emerged with the establishment of the humanities in the eighteenth century. It was understood as a token of Roman lineage and as such implied that "something" Roman was intentionally imitated. Initially, Romanesque was used exclusively to describe coarse masonry buildings in Western Europe erected after the Fall of Rome and before the Gothic era. However, it soon came to characterize a variety of architectural expressions from all over Europe and within a loosely defined and rather lengthy period (spanning from the sixth or eighth century to the twelfth or thirteenth century). The problems involved in defining the Romanesque

style can be exemplified in the words of the English art historian Eric Fernie: "It is supported by the clarity of its main characteristic, which is most often seen, in all the visual arts but especially in architecture, as the articulation of parts from smallest to largest, forming clear geometrical shapes which relate to one another in understandable ways" (Fernie 2010, 295). In the Danish context, the term Romanesque is usually used to date sacred architecture and artifacts from the period between *c.* 1100 and 1250.[6] Nevertheless, Romanesque architecture, in the broadest sense, is traditionally understood as having the same point of reference, the Roman Empire, literally meaning "in the Roman manner." Moreover, it is an established convention to distinguish between the rounded Romanesque arch and the succeeding Gothic pointed arch: the example par excellence of the idea of the evolution of style.

Systematic art history has more or less written off the rounded arch as a whim of fashion and thus as devoid of meaning. Contrary to this, this article claims that this common and repeated motif – monumental as well as decorative – was intended to function as a memory-based framework of related stories activated by ritual practices. As argued elsewhere, it is

> exactly because the semi-circular arch is commonplace in the rural churches, [that] I propose using this exact term and labelling the semi-circular motif a "commonplace motif." Commonplace, however, is not to be understood as a platitude. By contrast, I suggest using this notion as it derives from the Classical Latin *locus communis*, designating "*general arguments*, which do not grow out of the particular facts of a case, but are applicable to any class of cases." The point is thus that this motif by its very nature is in flux, and as such, it constitutes a dynamic interplay between the conventional static categories of ornament, iconography, microarchitecture, and monumental architecture. From this follows, I claim, that the same exact motif must be flexible in its rhetorical implications, essentially encompassing a scale from "explicit representation" to "trite stylistic denominator" depending on recipient and setting. Yet, even the "empty characteristic" of a style still embeds its parental origin; be it actively acknowledged or just chosen on purely aesthetic grounds. (Bonde [forthcoming])

Approaching the churches' style – or visual articulation, if you will – from a rhetorical standpoint allows us at once to rise above the material remnants while still effectively grounding the interpretations in them. In this way, the commonplace motif as defined by commonplace theory escapes the methodological pitfalls of, for instance, fixed intentions. As such, it is in opposition to Schapiro's claim that style is "constant form." Rather, style as a "vehicle of expression" is arguably in constant flux. Meaning is not solely defined by the autonomous

6 An extensive discussion of the term Romanesque and its usage can be found in my forthcoming dissertation. I have also touched upon the subject in (Bonde [forthcoming]).

stylistic choices of an artist or patron. While meaning is by definition embedded in form – as a mixture of continuity and change – it is continuously negotiated in the meeting with recipients. Meaning arises not only by way of form. It arises in interplay between various factors. Therefore, in our search for the medieval self, we have to transcend the traditional discipline-specific boundaries: because, if we accept that meaning is never fixed, it follows that neither is style nor selves.

The rhetorical implications of commonplace theory accommodate the multilayered plurality of meanings inherent in medieval cognition and thus in medieval material culture (Carruthers 1990, 1998, 2013). By using this approach, we might be able to explore a notion of the self from the Danish churches. We can discuss, for instance, the seemingly basic question: What can the physical remnants tell us of medieval meaning-making? By accepting that the commonplace motif has a rhetorical function, it follows that some sort of meaning-making occurs when the church is in use, is activated. The question then arises as to where we might locate this meaning-making: in the self, in the material commonplace motif, in the ritual practices, or perhaps in their interplay?

Activating Space: The Ritual Movements of Sunday Mass

In order to explore the role of the material commonplace motif in the process of meaning-making, we have to gain an understanding of just how the churches were used.[7] We have to get a tentative idea as to how the ritual practices, for which the churches were built, utilized the actual, physical building and its visual articulation. The aim is, in other words, to explore to what extent it is possible to "activate" a (re-)constructed space from a remote past. It should be stressed, however, that this is not just gesturing at the geometrical space defined by the physical walls. No, this also concerns the populated space, the social space, the dynamic space. As such, two things are presupposed: 1) that space(s) and the perception or experience of the space(s) are cultural phenomena, which in turn are always socially constructed (following the definition by Lefebvre 2009), and 2) that space(s), ritual practices in space(s), and the practitioners in said ritual practices are in continuous interplay and thus prerequisites for meaning-making.

7 Parts of this subsection is also included in (Bonde [forthcoming]).

To illustrate and further explain what is meant by this, and as there are no Danish written expositions from the period in question, the following "activation" will be based on the medieval Mass expositions written in Old Norse (namely, the compilation *Messuskýringar* comprising texts dated between 1150 and 1500), as these, with all reservations, in the main follow Continental European practices.[8] It is arguably justifiable to use the Norse expositions, as it is very unlikely that the ritual practices in the Danish churches would diverge noticeably from the Nordic practices. Nevertheless, one could easily mention a variety of notorious methodological problems involved in dealing with the relation between church architecture, symbolism, and function (function here understood as the ritual practices performed in a consecrated space) (see, e.g., Crossley 1988). However, it should suffice here to only briefly reiterate that the normative Mass expositions, of course, cannot be taken as evidence of how the rituals were actually performed – especially not when it comes to the rural churches. This being said, the expositions do provide us with a glimpse of the medieval ritual practice as it would *ideally* have unfolded around and inside the church. Moreover, and as discussed above and hopefully illustrated in Figs. 1a–c and 2a–e, the uniformity in spatial layout, furnishing, and overall visual expression in the Danish twelfth-century churches allow us to assume as a bare minimum that a) Mass was celebrated, as we can see from the altars, b) that baptisms were performed, as established by the font's prominent position in the nave, and c) that funeral rites were held, as indicated by contemporary burials in the surrounding area of the church. All of these different rituals involved, of course, ritual practices. In the following, the focus will be on the liturgy of Mass, as this was one of the most frequently performed rituals in the rural churches. It should be noted, however, that the movements described here and shown in Figs. 3a–c are expressions of an *ideal* solution and are based on my interpretation of the Old Norse text compilation.

A basic liturgy of Mass, meaning one stripped of all "extra" ceremonial splendor, required as a minimum a priest and preferably also a clerk or an altar boy. In principle, no congregation was needed, but for the purposes of this article, we will

8 Messuskýringar 1962. The Norse collection was first published by the Norwegian church historian Oluf Kolsrud in 1952, albeit in a non-normalized edition. Kolsrud's edition contains the following Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts: AM 237 a fol, AM 238 XXIII fol, AM 238 XXVI fol, AM 619 4to (also known as *The Norwegian Homily Book*, published in *Gamal norsk homilebok* 1966), AM 624 4to, AM 625 4to, AM 672 4to, AM 435 12mo, Holm perg 5 fol. Holm perg 15 4to (also known as *The Icelandic Homily Book*, published in *Icelandic Homily Book* 1993), RA Skokloster E 8822 fol. For a synthetic, annotated edition with a modern translation (modern Norwegian), see *Messuskýringar* 2014. For the European practices, see, e.g., Durand 1995.

include a congregation and thus focus on Sunday Mass. Sunday Mass was the ceremonial core of the medieval, rural parish and most probably the time of the week when the Church met the worshippers. The ritual started outside the church,[9] presumably in front of the main entrance, which in the case of the Danish rural churches would be the southern portal. The worshippers were blessed with holy water before walking in procession around the church, moving east to west (Fig. 3a). Returning to the main entrance, a prayer was said and the procession entered the church (*Messuskýringar* 1962, 38–9; *Messuskýringar* 2014, 93). Inside, the priest and clerk walked down the nave and stepped into the chancel area. The priest would then kiss the altar and kneel before it, accordingly initiating Mass (Fig. 3b). From this moment, the priest would not leave the chancel area before Mass was over (Fig. 3c). Thus, a multitude of minor ritual movements was restricted to this area. The priest and the clerk would then perform Mass in what seems to have been an interplay between the two. Whoever performed whichever part of the ritual, the only instance, it would seem, of leaving the chancel area during the celebration was when Gradual was sung and perhaps at "the sign of peace." According to the Old Norse expositions, Gradual was "often sung below the staircase" (*at á pollom er funget ıðola*),[10] which can only be understood as on the floor level of the nave in front of the chancel arch, as only one or a few steps would lead up to the chancel (see Fig. 1c). Moving on to the climactic part of Mass, it is stated that a book should be presented to perform "the sign of peace" and that "the kiss of peace moves among all present" (*oc fiðan fer friðar koff allra manna á miðlı tıl þeırrar*).[11] How and to what extent this happened is of course impossible to say.[12] The culmination of Mass, the Eucharist, was also performed inside the chancel area and the Communion itself was most likely just taken by the priest, which essentially completed the celebration. Of the exit from the church, there is a paucity of information. It is merely noted that holy water was sprinkled on the congregation before they left the church. If this were indeed customary, it would probably have meant that the priest or the clerk would descend from the chancel in

9 This is only described in AM 625 [*dat*. 1470], yet in the famous compilation by William Durand of Mende the *vidi aquam* / *asperges me* seems to have been a convention from quite early on (Durand 1995, 240ff.), Liber qvartvs.

10 My paraphrase of text A (AM 619 4to (1200–1225) in *Messuskýringar* 1962, 16). See also *Messuskýringar* 2014, 74.

11 My paraphrase of text A (AM 619 4to (1200–1225) in *Messuskýringar* 1962, 23). See also *Messuskýringar* 2014, 75.

12 In Continental sources, it is usually a so-called *pax* that should be presented and kissed. The *pax* could take many different shapes or forms. There are, for instance, examples of ivory carvings mounted on handles. Yet, a book cover with a plaque could also constitute a *pax*.

order to carry out this last part (*Messuskýringar* 1962, 24–5, 39; *Messuskýringar* 2014, 76, 94).

Now, having tentatively activated the church building and one of its usages, we might notice that both types of sources (that is, the material remnants and the written expositions) are, indeed, remarkably silent when it comes to conceptions of individuals or selves. So, how are we to locate a notion of the self from the rural churches? Posing this question conveniently brings us back to the working hypothesis stated in the introduction: namely that meaning-making arises in *interplay* between ritual practices, practitioners, and the churches' visual articulation. In this definition, the self is *part of* the overall meaning-making (as practitioner) on the exact same terms as the churches' visual articulation and the usage. As is hopefully clear by now, the working hypothesis takes as its underlying assumption commonplace theory's rhetorical implication, namely that meaning making is in flux. Moreover, and as we shall see below, commonplace theory, therefore, draws on or rather cooperates with the praxis-oriented brand of social, cultural theory, namely practice theory.

Fusing Theories: The Decentralization of the Subject and the Affectivity of Practice

As just described, the ritual practices in the rural churches involved *movement* in space(s), and movement in space(s) implies bodies and materiality. Whereas the fixities of especially the interior arrangement of furnishings clearly suggest that bodies were supposed to move about them, the remnants are still silent as to what their visual articulation intended. How were they perceived during practice? Neither the buildings nor the written expositions inform us the degree of participation by the congregation, let alone of perception or self-apprehension during the practice! We should, however, keep in mind that active participation in the ritual practices by the individual member of a parish (which was crucial in late-medieval devotional practices) was essentially not required. The parish priest "was the agent designated to perform the communication with the divine on behalf of the gathering" (Jürgensen 2018, 444).[13] Likewise, the Old Norse texts only offer occasional comment on participation. Formulations regarding participation are thus in first-person plural: "We sing this song as we greet the priest,

13 This is also the reason why the degree of lay church attendance in rural, twelfth-century Denmark is still heavily debated.

who brings forward sacrifice to God in peace for us." (Af | þyı fýngo*m* y*ér* þan fong at y*er* toko*m* ke*n*ne ma*n*n er fóın yıll føra .G*uð*e. tıl frıðar oss.).[14] Other formulations merely imply an audience, or, the wording is as if stated by a beholder, although not necessarily a participant. For instance, it is stated that everyone should bow their head at a specific song, that the kiss of peace should move among all present, that holy water should be sprinkled on everyone present, and that some of the holy water should be brought back home by the congregation so as to bless their home (*Messuskýringar* 1962, 38, 44; *Messuskýringar* 2014, 93, 99). The lack of active participation by the congregation, naturally, complicates our exploration of meaning-making and search for the self in the Danish churches.

The formalistic, style-historical understanding of the round arch as a trite, stylistic denominator cannot be used as a methodological tool when asking about the self. The underlying basic assumption in a conventional art-historical line of thinking is that the arch or arcade only *is* in some or other "relation" to a human subject: that is, as a purely aesthetic product of or as conceived by said human subject (i.e., an *asymmetric* relationship between subject and object). Moreover, we have no written sources from contemporary, worshipping participants that might testify to their perception of the church's visual articulation or understanding of the ritual practice. At this point, then, it seems only reasonable to revoke the rhetorical implications of commonplace theory and claim that the commonplace motif as a non-human, yet human-made, object embeds the same tacit knowledge as the human subject. The question then arises as to how we might access this shared tacit knowledge and whether or not it reveals information of a medieval self. This is where theories of "the social" might prove useful. More specifically, this article turns to practice theory as formulated by the German sociologist Andreas Reckwitz in his two interrelated articles of 2002 (2002a and 2002b).[15] Reckwitz essentially combines the French philosopher and ethnographer Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour 1993 [1991], 2005) with an idealized version of the early praxeological thinking of the American philosopher Theodore Schatzki (1996). Moreover, combining the rhetorical and practice-based approaches offers a heuristic potential for including

14 My paraphrase of text A (AM 619 4to (1200–1225) in *Messuskýringar* 1962, 11–12.) See also *Messuskýringar* 2014, 71.

15 As the identity of praxeology is still debated (Postill 2010; Schatzki, Knorr, Cetina, and von Savigny 2001; Hui, Schatzki, and Shove 2017), it should be noted that this article will be operating with only this one specific strand of second-generation practice theory. I have taken the liberty of summarizing this theoretical extrapolation as the "Reckwitzian" version of practice theory.

considerations of the aesthetic dimension of "atmosphere" (emotions, feelings, and affects), which in turn permits a discussion of the self.

Practice theory – and ANT for that matter – distinguishes itself from the materialist / idealist ways of thinking, as well as from the culturalist / linguist traditions, by promoting a flat ontology of human and non-human actors (Latour 1993 [1991]). Therefore, Reckwitz (2002b, 246) puts much energy into carefully mapping out their main divergence; that is, the *place* of the social.[16] In the cultural (linguist) theories, the social is always "connected with symbolic and cognitive structures of knowledge," (Reckwitz 2002b, 247) however, in quite diverse ways. Nevertheless, it is always placed in the mind of the subject, just as was seen to be the case in the conventional art-historical approach. Objects and happenings are to be interpreted by subjects in order for meaning-making to occur *within* the subject. In stark contrast, the praxeological thinking (obviously) places the social in practices; meaning, the social is understood as "a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another" (Reckwitz 2002b, 249). The subject is thus decentered, as the

> conventionalized "mental" activities of understanding, knowing how and desiring are necessary elements and qualities of a practice in which the single individual participates, not qualities of the individual (. . .) A practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood. (Reckwitz 2002b, 250)

The fundamental problem with the culturalist / linguist theories is then, according to Reckwitz, that "the material entities do not appear as things to be handled, but as objects to be interpreted" (Reckwitz 2002a, 208), effectively evoking Latour's object-oriented flat ontology. Along with Latour, Reckwitz argues that a practice consists at once of both human inter-subjectivity and non-human inter-objectivity. In other words, things or objects are constitutive for social practices in the exact same way as humans are (Reckwitz 2002a, 208–9; 2002b, 253): they have the same degree of agency. This Latourian concept is then fused with the praxeological thinking of primarily early, Wittgensteinian inspired, Schatzki (Schatzki 1996), which enables Reckwitz to redefine things as "irreplaceable components of certain social practices (. . .) in their being 'handled' in certain ways" (Reckwitz 2002a,

16 In his two complimentary articles (Reckwitz 2002b, 2002a), Reckwitz outlines the theoretical developments within the social sciences, or more specifically to and within the theories of culture. It might even be possible to argue that he understands these theoretical shifts or patricides as necessary stepping-stones toward the ultimate goal of practice theory as a coherent heuristic device. The point of this is also to make a clear distinction between Reckwitz's construct of a "purified" practice theory on the one hand, and the diverse praxeological remarks made by the broad movement of theorists within social, cultural theory on the other.

210). In this way, the repeated "doings with things," this "regular bodily activity" is comprised by interplay of a presupposed specific, practical knowledge of how to handle the particular thing; a knowledge both determined *by* – while determin*ing* – the thing. As such, in the Reckwitzian praxeological approach, things are "materialized understandings," which basically means that the same tacit knowledge can be found in both the human subject and in the non-human object (Reckwitz 2002a, 211–2). This definition, as we recall, is implicit in our working hypothesis.

It must be asked along with the "Reckwitzian" praxeological thinking to what extent it is possible to understand the visual articulation of the commonplace motif and the commonplace movements described in the expositions as (parts of) a social practice. And, in turn, if and how a social practice might provide information about a medieval self. This is essentially the experiment. To do so, this article will pay special attention to the Reckwitzian approach to artifacts and their agency and thus to the artifact's place or role in establishing social practices, essentially as artifacts are understood as *co-generators* of meaning.

Affecting the Self through Commonplace Movements: An Experiment

In the above walk-through of the liturgy of Mass, all minor movements by the priest and clerk inside the chancel area have been omitted, as they mainly follow the standard regulations of continental European practices and are of little concern to the overall argument in this article. Instead, the article highlighted the largescale movements to demonstrate that they are centered on the two primary thresholds of the church building, namely the portal and the chancel arch (see Figs. 3a–c). This observation is in itself not surprising, as numerous studies of the liminality of the threshold have been carried out since van Gennep published his seminal "Rites of passage" over a century ago.[17] Nevertheless, the reason for emphasizing the ritual's focus on the thresholds is not the liminality per se. Rather, the reason lies in the working hypothesis that meaning-making arises in the interplay between the ritual practices, the practitioners, and the churches' visual articulation. In other words, the visual articulation of the commonplace motif is a vital part of the ritual practice and, thus, of the meaning-

17 Gennep 1981 [1909]. With regards to the Scandinavian churches and their rites, see especially Andås 2007.

making in said ritual. However, as shall be seen below, it is not just the round-arched wall openings that partake in the meaning-making. All instances of the semi-circular commonplace motif – ubiquitous, inside as well as outside – are part of the meaning-making.

The social practice of viewing Mass or attending Mass in the twelfth-century churches would, in a praxeological line of thinking, constitute the routinized doings or handling of things. The "thing," in our case then, would be the physical church building. What is of special interest to the present purposes is that meaning-making lies in the routine practice, that is to say, in the repeated ritual in and around the church. The church spaces, in plural – be it the outside or the inside – constitute, then, what Reckwitz has labelled "affective spaces" (Reckwitz 2012). These spaces are products of "matches between atmospheres and sensitivities" (Reckwitz 2012, 255), which are activated by the routine practices. By including (parts of) the aesthetic theory of German philosopher Gernot Böhme (1993), Reckwitz (2017, 117) objects to the widespread assumption in sociology that affects are "non-social, non-cultural phenomena occurring within individual's bodies or individual's psyche," that is, internal to the subject.[18] Instead, he claims, affects are part of practices, in that affects are social and thus by definition not subjective. Affects are activities, and they are bodily arousal or excitement spurred by the social and space(s). Affects are "properties of the specific affective 'attunement' or mood of the respective practice," that is, exterior to the subject (Reckwitz 2017, 119). Moreover, affects are at once material and cultural and are thus general phenomena of every single practice (Reckwitz 2017, 118–9). The main point is, more simply put, that from "the view point of the human subject, it can be said that the affectivity of a practice comprises specific stimulations attached to other people, things or ideas" (Reckwitz 2017, 121).

So, what Reckwitz is essentially arguing is that spaces should not be regarded as mere producers of meaning *in* a recipient, because "affects only form when a space is practically appropriated by its users, which always activates these users' implicit cultural schemes and routines" (Reckwitz 2012, 255). The flat ontology argument posed here, obviously, implies that affectivity is always a result of the co-presence and interaction of the human subject with the non-human object – it is an external property to the individual. The externality implied here is also external to the churches and their visual articulation. From this

18 It should be noted that Böhme is not a praxeologist. Rather, he has propounded a phenomenological atmosphere theory (an ecological aesthetics), essentially rejecting the traditional Hegelian definition of aesthetics by claiming that atmosphere is existential. Thus, Böhme's aesthetics are based on a theory of perception in which the human bodily experience is only in coexistence with the specific environment (atmosphere). See, e.g., Böhme (1993).

follows that the tacit knowledge, the seeds of potential meaning-making, which are embedded in the material remnants, by definition would have existed in the medieval subject experiencing the church through the ritual practice. The point here is, in other words, that by exploring the *intent* in the churches' visual articulation, we are simultaneously exploring the potential meaning-making in the ritual practice and thus aspects of perception by the participating self.

The art historian is usually left with only a general idea of how a twelfth-century, rural church was in fact constituted, while the written sources tell of how the church was ideally used. Looking at the schematic drawings of a rural church building, it quickly becomes apparent that the thresholds on which it was just seen that the largescale movements were centered are essentially monumental examples of the round-arched commonplace motif (Figs. 2c, e). As such, they constitute a vital part of both the practice and of the "thing to be handled." As already stated, according to commonplace theory, the round-arched motif has the potential to function as a memory-based framework of related stories activated by ritual practices. These stories are in turn conditioned by a cluster of biblical metaphors, which defined the medieval world view.[19]

Fusing commonplace theory with the Reckwitzian take on practice theory, we could say that, potentially, three types of meaning-making or productions of meaning could occur during the celebration of Mass. First, the exterior practice of gathering in front of the portal and the following procession around the church building terminating again in front of the same portal before entering has the potential to – at the very least – spur an expectation of entering, which culminates in the actual entering of the church through the portal, a monumental commonplace motif (Figs. 2c, 3a–b). During Mass inside the church, the second type of meaning-making could be spurred. From the nave – through the chancel arch, yet another monumental commonplace motif – the worshipper witness glimpses of ritualized movements and the handling of sacred objects by the priest. As previously described, actual contact between the affective spaces of the nave and the chancel could be communicated through the *pax* or "kiss of peace," which would generate a movement in the worshipper towards this new focal point – yet only momentarily before it retreated back through the chancel arch again. This suggests the promise of entering the most holy, potentially alluding to both the physical chancel and to the Heavenly Jerusalem. The third possible meaning-making is exterior as well as interior. It once again pertains to

19 This is argued and elaborated in Bonde [forthcoming]. All of the related stories are in turn conditioned by the Christian story-world; for this concept, see Aavitsland, Oftestad, and Zorgati [forthcoming].

the commonplace motif, which we saw to be ubiquitous in the visual expression of the churches. However, it now pertains to the non-monumental motifs, those traditionally dismissed as mere stylistic decoration. For instance, during the procession around the church – even before entering – you would see the semi-circular structure of the arch in the window openings, in wall recesses, or, even on the base courses (Figs. 2a–b). The same could be repeated on the arches found on the inside of the church, for instance, the arcades running along the baptismal font or framing biblical narratives in the murals (Fig. 2d). The notion of entering is here only possible through allusion. The routinized bodily practice of attending Mass can thus be understood as a practice of "entering." More simply put, one could claim that the three types of meaning-making just described are determined by degrees of contact with the Divine; 1) the physical or complete contact – that is, actual entering through the portal; 2) the limited physical contact of observing through the chancel arch and perhaps even touching parts from the most holy area; and 3) the restricted and optical only contact of solely viewing through the peepholes of the arcades to the otherworldly. What is important here is that the commonplace motif is not merely a frame in the shape of the Romanesque arch. Rather, its insisting presence adds to the process of meaning-making. It has a clear intent and role to play. As such, all of the arches and arcades generate affectivity in co-existence with practice and practitioner.

The practice of entering – physically or by allusion – is thus strongly inherent in the practice of attending Mass in the twelfth century, as may be testified by the physical remnants. The production of meaning, then, if we accept this argument, is thus channelled through the commonplace motif of the arcade when activated by the practice and affectively experienced.

Conclusion

The self has been at the center of the classical theories in the humanities, as well as in the social sciences, since the very beginning. What is particular to the Reckwitzian practice theory is, among other things, that the self is decentered and that the "affective structure of a practice explodes the inside / outside binary, by being internal and external at the same time" (Reckwitz 2017, 119). The self is neither autonomous nor norm-following, and agency is implicit in human subject as well as in non-human object and in the social practice itself. This leaves no room for a self in a linguist or classical cognitive sense. However, it is not possible to explore the self as a traditional subject-based entity through the visual articulation of the churches. The sources simply do not allow it. So, if we

want to explore a notion of the self through the material remnants of the rural churches, we have to think differently. Thus, and as stated in the introduction, this article has been a theoretical and methodological experiment. It is my firm conviction that revisiting the churches equipped with novel theories enables us to extrapolate otherwise inaccessible information. By fusing commonplace theory with the Reckwitzian praxeological thinking, it was possible to test a working hypothesis concerning meaning-making in the churches, which in turn allow us to say something about the self, albeit not about a specific self.

The affective space(s) in and around the churches are imbued with meaning. At least parts of the potential meaning-making are, arguably, accessible. The rhetorical quality of the commonplace motif in itself embeds a plurality of potential meaning-making – meaning-making that is conditioned by and released only when activated in a practice. The main point is thus that the visual articulation of the churches embeds a knowledge of past "handling." This handling mirrors a mental or cognitive tacit knowledge that would presumably have been embedded in a medieval worshipper, as a practice presupposes knowledge in order to be carried out. Does this, then, tell us anything about the self? It can be argued that it does not tell of a specific, autonomous self, in the modern sense of the word. Instead, a commonplace self or properties of a participating self can be deduced. As such, the concept of the self is understood as a "selfhood" included in a collective or group, partaking in a practice. The motivation is an integral part of the practice, and the affective atmosphere that arises in the meaning-making is indeed constituted in an interplay between space(s), commonplace motifs, and the practitioner.

However, the reader might wonder, at this point, what would be so different about the pointed arch as the commonplace motif? The immediate answer would be nothing. The pointed arch can indeed be understood as a commonplace motif, as this architectural motif is used in much the same way as the rounded arch. However, there are important differences to be noticed – especially when asking for meaning-making. Commonplace motifs, as phenomena, are neither tied to the round arch nor to a specific period of time. Instead, commonplace motifs are subjects to both continuity and change. The pointed arch may be understood as a modernization of the rounded commonplace motif. However, in the Danish churches, the pointed arch (or rather four-centered arch)[20] co-exists with the rounded arch. As such, the two commonplace motifs informs one another. In this way, some 'original' meanings probably disappeared, while new ones arose.

20 Almost no genuine Gothic, rural churches were built in Denmark. Rather, the older Romanesque ones were subject to disparate renewals; see Jürgensen (2018).

The point is, in other words, not to suggest that there is only one commonplace motif. There is a plethora of commonplace motifs. Some are deployed simultaneously / in parallel within the same buildings. This seems to have been the case in, for instance, the Danish churches in the centuries following their erection, and in fact all the way up to the present. Meaning-making, therefore, is in constant flux, just as style and selves are.[21]

As is hopefully also clear by now, an underlying objective in this article – besides the immediate value of exploring the twelfth-century churches from a non-conventional approach – has been to discuss more generally the applicability of the social theories within the humanities, especially their usefulness in academic disciplines primarily concerned with historical and material remnants. As for the study of the Danish medieval churches, new perspectives have been wanting for a long time, and experimenting with theories across conventional disciplinary boundaries might prove useful. If nothing else, experimenting might provoke fruitful new discussions.

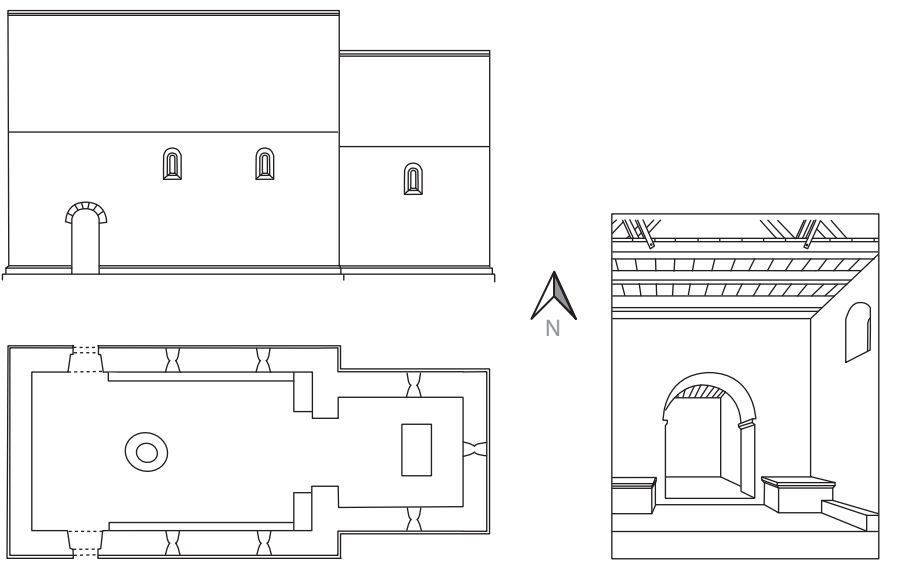

Figure 1: Elevation, plan, and cross-section of a generic, Danish rural church from the twelfth century. After *Danmarks kirker, Fagordbog*. Altered and supplemented by the author. Digitized by Kim Bonde 2019.

21 This aspect of the commonplace motif is subject to thorough discussion in my forthcoming dissertation.

Figure 2: Random selection of details from twelfth-century churches, Denmark. (a) Arcade carvings, base courses, Bjerreby Church, Funen. (b) Blind arcades, exterior recesses, Hammelev Church, Southern Jutland. (c) Portal, Borup Church, Northern Jutland. (d) Arcaded baptismal font, Jegerup Church, Southern Jutland. (e) Chancel arch, facing West, Tveje Merløse Church, Zealand. Photos by the author 2017–2019.

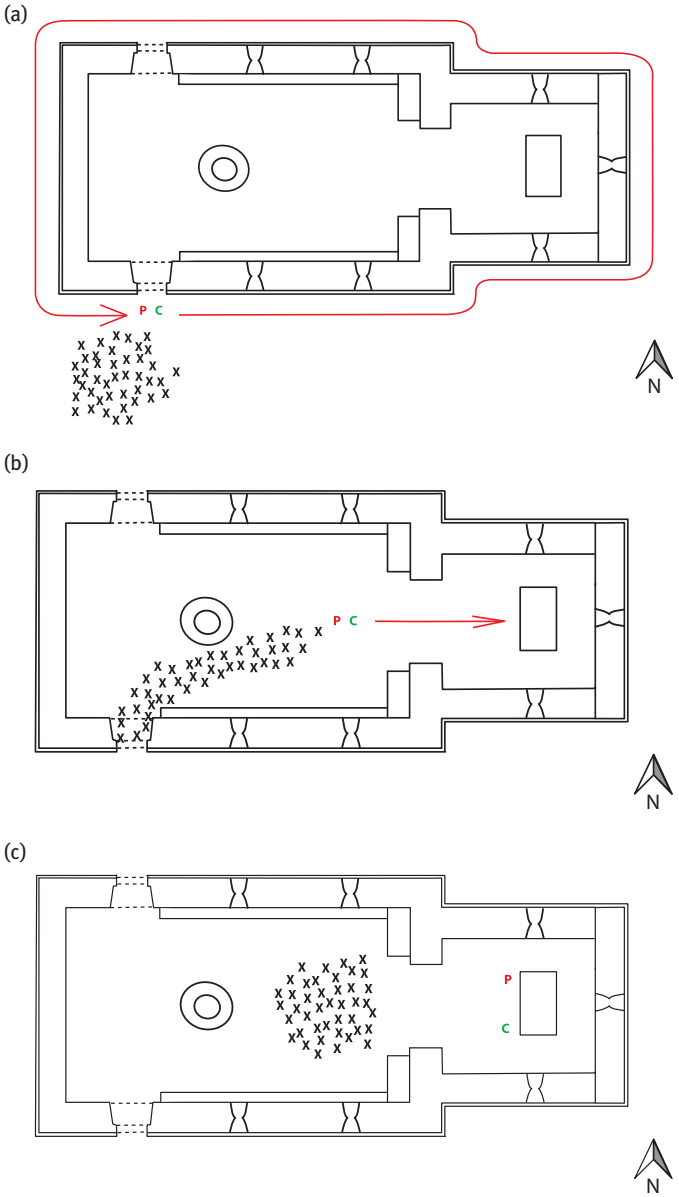

Figure 3: (a–c) Interpretation of large-scale movements involved in Sunday Mass. P is priest, c is clerk, x are worshippers.
Drawn by the author. Digitized by Kim Bonde 2019.

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Karen Langsholt Holmqvist

The Creation of Selves as a Social Practice and Cognitive Process: A Study of the Construction of Selves in Medieval Graffiti

Abstract: My aim with this article is to propose a model for studying the self in graffiti inscriptions, in particular runic graffiti inscriptions from medieval Scandinavia. I combine insights from cognitive and practice theory, and the combination can aid in systematizing the relation between carver, inscription, and context. A premise for the article is that graffiti expressions, and particularly expressions of self, are constructed individually and in relation to others: they are both personal and social. As a basis for the discussions, I draw on examples of graffiti from the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim and Maeshowe, Orkney. The two contexts, a cathedral and a grave mound, are widely different, and I demonstrate how the carvers interact cognitively with their material and social surroundings to create inscriptions and expressions of self, fit for each context.

Keywords: practice theory, cognitive theory, blending, situated cognition, distributed cognition, agency, runes, graffiti, Maeshowe, Orkney, Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim, Norway

Medieval graffiti provides a rare insight into the medieval mind. In contrast to manuscript texts, it is not mediated to us by one or more scribes; the medieval texts we can read on walls today are the same texts as those carved and read by people living in the Middle Ages.[1] Moreover, graffiti inscriptions were created in informal medieval contexts that we rarely have access to today. As such, this material gives us a unique opportunity to study the medieval self.

According to Michael Barnes, "[r]unological theory can only come from the application to specific runological problems of theories from other disciplines" (2013, 27). This statement is based on a rather narrow understanding of runology

1 The material carries with it a range of other methodological problems, however, but this is not the place to discuss them.

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as a field, but however you define the field, there is general agreement that it lies at a crossing point between several academic disciplines.[2] Traditionally, these have mainly been linguistics, philology, and archaeology, and though these disciplines are still central to runology, several scholars have explored other approaches to runology in recent years.[3] Here, I will turn to the social and cognitive sciences for a theoretical foundation. These fields have rarely been used in runology previously, and they have never before been combined in a runological study. They could provide valuable insights into runology, however, as both situated cognition and practice theory emphasize the importance of context. Inscriptions are always closely tied to a context, and the two theoretical disciplines may therefore help the scholar in systematizing the relation between inscription and context. Conceptualizing graffiti carving as a practice may aid our understanding of the interplay between carver, physical surroundings, material artifacts, other people in the carver's surroundings, and the carver's licit knowledge and understanding. Understanding graffiti carving as both a practice and the result of cognitive processes shows the dynamics of the carving process and how it is upheld and how it evolved over time through each carver's cognitive engagement and participation.

In this article, I will discuss and merge two theoretical approaches that can be used to access the self in medieval graffiti inscriptions[4]: cognitive theory,

2 See, for example, Terje Spurkland (1987), who argues that runology should include linguistics, philology, archaeology, and cultural history, but that the primary focus should be on the first two. Lena Peterson (1995) presents both a narrow and a broader definition but concludes that "[k]ärnan i runologin måste alltid vara språkvetenskaplig" (the core of runology must always be linguistic [my translation]) (ibid., 41). Michael Lerche Nielsen (1997) agrees, in the main, with Spurkland and Peterson, but he places a stronger emphasis on archaeology as most new finds appear in archaeological excavations, and he places runology between linguistics and archaeology.

3 See, for instance, Henrik Williams' (2013) exploration of the social dimensions of runestones, Judith Jesch's (1994) discussion of pitfalls and opportunities of using runic inscriptions in the study of social history, Marco Bianchi's (2010) multimodal and semiotic analysis of the Swedish runestones, and the various contributions on epigraphy and intermediality in Bauer, Kleivane, and Spurkland (2018).

4 Graffiti inscriptions are particularly apt for illustrating how we can study the self, as we may assume that there is generally only one agent per inscription: the carver. In formal inscriptions, for instance, the matter is often complicated by a number of unknown agents, such as donors and commissioners. Therefore, the reader should be aware that what is presented here is a simple model, aimed at "graffiti selves." Studying the self in other types of inscriptions will often require the addition of complicating factors. However, I start with a simple model to single out the most basic factors. Only then can one proceed to more complicated matters.

particularly the concept of situated cognition, and practice theory as it is presented by Theodore Schatzki and Andreas Reckwitz.[5] The merging of these two theories results in two premises for my discussions. The first is that graffiti inscriptions are essentially a product of both practices and cognition. Second, the self emerges through the carving process and is a cognitive construction that is constantly shaped and reshaped in relation to the social and material environment. In the discussions, I will explore two research questions: 1) how is the interplay between practice and cognition visible in the inscriptions?, and 2) how are the selves expressed in the inscriptions shaped by the carvers' cognition and the practice of carving? As a basis for discussing the research questions, I will use examples from two widely different locations where much medieval graffiti has been found: the Nidaros Cathedral and Maeshowe. Approaching a varied material with the combination of these two theories will illustrate the relevance and usefulness of combining the two theories when studying various inscription-contexts. I argue that merging practice theory and cognitive theory can give us an understanding of inscriptions as cognitive products created through a practice and of the self as both a cognitive and social construction.

Merging the Theories

Before discussing how aspects of cognitive theory and practice theory may be combined and applied to the study of the self in inscriptions, I will introduce briefly each theory and the aspects within them that I will combine. The theories have a similar approach in that they both emphasize the importance of context, but their points of focus and perceptions of the individual diverge. Each theory also gives a different perspective on the inscriptions and the selves created in them. With practice theory, the inscriptions are explained through the social practice they form a part of. Cognitive theory, however, explains the inscriptions from the starting point of the carver's cognitive process. The two theories are not as different as they seem, however, as cognition conditions every practice, and is also dependent upon the context in which it is situated.

5 These are only two of several possible approaches to the self, though I will not go into alternative approaches here. For a broader overview, see the introduction to this volume.

Cognitive Theory

Within cognitive theory, I will focus on the concept of situated cognition, which defines cognition as interrelated with its context. According to proponents of situated cognition, cognitive processes are dependent upon the agent's body as well as the situation and context in which the cognitive process is located (see Robbins and Aydede 2009; Smith and Conrey 2009; Smith and Semin 2007). As an example, Smith and Conrey (2009) are concerned with how cognition is situated in a social context and how the communicative context, our relations to others, and associations with different social groups influence our cognitive processes. Moreover, they also discuss how, when in a group, people's thoughts evolve together as if all the group members together participate in a larger cognitive process. This is known as distributed cognition, and it has been demonstrated how the concept can explain complex teamwork and various other kinds of interaction between an agent and his or her surroundings. Examples are the use of a notebook to aid the memory (Clark and Chalmers 2010, 33–37), the various coordinated operations necessary for running a theatre performance in the Globe (Tribble 2005), the performance of a research project (Giere and Moffatt 2003: 305–8), and negotiation and formation of memory in a social group (Barnier et al. 2008; Lundhaug 2014). Distributed cognition offers interesting perspectives when discussing how inscriptions from the same context relate to each other, though it should be remarked that the concept is developed for describing simultaneous interaction and not interaction over time. The concept of distributed cognition can be perceived as an extreme version of situated cognition, where the surroundings not only affect the cognition; cognition is also extended to the surroundings.

Situated cognition can be explained through Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's (1998) concept of blending (see also Eriksen and Turner, this volume). Fauconnier and Turner never use the term situated cognition, but blending nevertheless provides a neat explanation for this concept. When thinking about an idea, we expand it, and when we are finished thinking about this idea, we compress it again (Turner 2014, 23–24). But the idea we expand is not necessarily identical to the one we compress. We do not think in a vacuum, so elements from our surroundings sneak in, altering our old ideas or creating completely new ones as a blend between our old ideas and elements from our social and material surroundings (see Turner 2014, 24). Turning back to situated cognition, it can be explained as expansion and compression of ideas in different surroundings, where each new expansion and compression brings in new elements to the idea.

Our idea of who we are is such a blend that is continually expanded and compressed. According to Turner (2014, 77–78, 88), our sense of self is constructed

dynamically and adapts to the circumstances we enter into. But at the same time, Turner writes, the "urge to compress and expand the self, to carry the self with us, seems to be a major influence on all our choices" (2014, 78). Our notion of a self, therefore, is not only dependent upon what experiences we have and what surroundings we are in, it is also the other way around. Our notion of a self also determines, at least to some degree, what choices we make and what situations and surroundings we seek out. The self is in our choices. Moving back to situated cognition, we see clearly the interdependent relationship between self and surroundings: the surroundings we are in, whether a grave mound, a cathedral, or an entirely different location, will determine how we perceive our self, but our notion of a self will determine what surroundings we choose to enter into.

Practice Theory

Practice theory is a cultural theory based on the fundamental assumption that practices are the basic structure of social life. I base my conception of practice theory on Theodore R. Schatzki (1996, 2001a, 2001b) and on the interpretation of Schatzki given by Andreas Reckwitz (2002a, 2002b, 2012) due to their emphasis of material surroundings, in addition to destabilizing factors such as affects, as components of the practice. Schatzki bases the theory on a reading of Ludwig Wittgenstein's works, which, he claims, help "position practices as the central phenomenon in the tangle that is human sociality" (Schatzki 1996, 12). Reckwitz, on the other hand, merges Theodore Schatzki's theory of social practices with Bruno Latour's emphasis on material objects as artifacts. Thus, in Reckwitz' account, a social practice is a doing or saying consisting of an agent (which is seen as a combination of body and mind), material objects, forms of knowing and understanding, and, finally, of routines and social structure; it is a routinized bodily and mental activity which builds on tacit knowledge and engagement with material objects and surroundings. In order to understand a practice, then, we need to take into account: material artifacts; the agent's body, mind, and tacit knowledge; and the social structures surrounding the practice. A feature distinguishing this version of practice theory from many other social theories is its focus on material artifacts as important components of the practice. Skis, for instance, are an important component of skiing, and the practice of skiing is just as meaningless without skis as without the human skier. Likewise, the practice of rune carving is impossible without anything to carve with and in. The material components of the practice are just as fundamental as the agents partaking in it.

Schatzki (2001b, 12) sees the social as "a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings." In other words, practices are the fundamental feature of social life. Underlying the practices are "shared practical understandings." We may not be aware of these understandings; we may not even be able to explain them if we were asked. The understandings are embodied. According to Schatzki (2001b, 17), "the body is the meeting point both of mind and activity and of individual activity and social manifold." As the understanding is rooted in our body, we know how to perform actions and comply with social norms without reflecting upon it. It is rooted in us. The embodied understanding and tacit knowledge we carry with us lead to reproduction of the practices; according to Reckwitz (2002b, 255), "[s]ocial practices are routines." In sum, then, practice theory explains how human beings interact with each other and their material surroundings, and how practices are learned and reproduced and thus create stability in a society.

When applying practice theory to an empirical material, a problem of definition arises: What exactly is a practice? How comprehensive is each practice, and how do they interrelate? Here, I will define a practice as a changing, yet relatively stable and repeating, pattern of actions. Thus, a carving practice is a repeating pattern of carving. The pattern repeats because the agents relate to earlier manifestations of the same pattern, and it changes according to the material and social surroundings and the agents partaking in the practice. For instance, a carving pattern repeats because new carvers relate to previous carvings. At the same time, a new material or social context, or new participants, may alter the pattern. Moreover, I understand practices as both overlapping networks and hierarchies. Thus, carving inscriptions in general may be termed an overarching practice (within the even broader practice of communication) wherein medieval graffiti carving is a sub-practice. This sub-practice divides into ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical sub-practices, and again into local practices, which may in turn branch into yet another level of local sub-practices which exist side by side in the same physical surroundings. I will refer to all of these levels as practices. Moreover, practices may interrelate across different categories: ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical inscriptions from the same area may, for instance, be closely related, and the same applies to formal inscriptions and graffiti found in the same church. Practices are not only organized hierarchically, therefore, but also as networks.

Agency, Change, and Context as a Problem and Way Forward

Two major problems for practice theory is how to explain individuality and change. Is our identity only the sum of the practices we partake in, or do we have a self

independent of these? And can practices change? Reading introductions to practice theory (Reckwitz 2002b; Schatzki 2001b), it may seem like practice theoreticians do indeed view the individual as no more than the sum of the practices each person partakes in and that practices are static entities that cannot change. This would make practice theory an ill-suited theory both for the study of the self and for a tradition as multifaceted and changeable as graffiti carving. However, both Reckwitz and Schatzki introduce factors in their theoretical frameworks that allow for individuality and change.[6] Reckwitz (2012) introduces what he terms affective spaces, stressing how the different components of a practice, particularly spaces, stir affects in the agents. Moreover, Reckwitz claims that spaces and affects have "destabilising and inventive potentials" (2012, 255). Schatzki (2001a) takes this a step further by introducing what he terms "teleoaffective structures," stating that mental states determine "what makes sense to people to do" (2001a, 57). Here, we arrive at a definition of practices as something much more than a simple repetition of actions by different agents. The agents are active participants, and their affects and ends are determining factors for how they choose to relate to the practice.

Cognitive theory fits neatly with the introduction to practice theory of affects and ends as both components seem to strengthen the cognitive aspects of the practice. Furthermore, cognitive theory holds as a fundamental assumption that human cognition is immensely flexible and in possession of agency (see Eriksen and Turner and Steen, this volume). Combining cognitive theory with a practice theory that incorporates affective spaces and teleoaffective structures leaves us with a framework where the agent acts within practices but still holds considerable agency. The agent is bound to relate to the practice, though how each agent chooses to relate to it is dependent on which other practices the agent partakes in, the affects with which the agent enters the practice, the affects the practice stirs in the agent, and the agent's intentions. The cognitive flexibility of the agent allows him or her to see multiple possibilities and choose between them. Often, the practice will dictate a specific course of action, and the agent will often choose this course, but that does not mean that s/he has not seen and considered other courses.

When merging cognitive and praxeological perspectives, the context for cognition also becomes much more well defined. As stated earlier, it is commonly acknowledged that our cognition is situated in a context, though many cognitivists only study a small fraction of this context. This is due to the fact that cognitive theory has experimental studies as an important part of its basis, and it is in the nature of such studies to focus on a certain aspect in a controlled

6 See also Raymond Caldwell's (2012) review of agency and change in Schatzki's work for another perspective on this.

environment. When such studies are applied to real-life situations, however, there are innumerable other factors at play as well. Understanding the context of cognition through the lens of practice theory will provide a structure to these factors, as they are all understood as aspects of a practice. To situate cognition in a practice means that we always have to take into account the entire context for cognition, at least to the extent that we have access to it.

Returning to the concept of distributed cognition, we also see that there are similarities between this concept and practices. As noted earlier, the term distributed cognition has been used to describe complex forms of teamwork where the social aspects are central and where a common cognitive system is developed and distributed between the participants. Such systems are often described in a strikingly similar way to practices. Emily Tribble (2005, 140), for instance, puts strong emphasis on both the physical and social surroundings of the participants and states that the output of the cognitive processes is stored not only in each participant's mind, but also in the surroundings. In descriptions of distributed cognitive systems, cognition is presented as something more than mind. Cognition is, in short, extended to both social and material surroundings. Similarly, participants in a practice are both shaped by and shaping their physical and social context; the way the participants act both relies upon and affects their surroundings. Carving inscriptions, for instance, leaves physical traces in the surroundings, traces that in turn can shape how the practice is performed in the future.

The major difference between the two concepts seems to be that the term distributed cognitive system is primarily used to describe environments where the social interaction is immediate and where all participants have their designated and well-defined role. Not all practices fit this description, but they may nevertheless have elements of the distributed cognitive system in them. An advantage of understanding the two concepts as interrelated is that a cognitive understanding of practices may aid our understanding of each agent's participation and cognitive involvement with practices, while the praxeological assumption that all our actions are fundamentally learned through social interaction and organized in practices can add interesting perspectives to studies of distributed cognitive systems.

To return to the self: combining cognitive and praxeological perspectives may also give us a new approach to its definition. As a basis, I will use a cognitive definition of the self: I see the self as a cognitive idea of oneself that each person continuously constructs and reconstructs.[7] As is stressed in the framework of situated cognition, though, this process of continuous construction never happens in a vacuum. It is situated in practices, and the agent's notion of

7 See Eriksen and Turner, this volume, for further discussions on this.

self is heavily dependent upon the practice s/he partakes in. Moreover, I hold that a notion of self is also constructed within each practice and that each agent will relate to this self by cognitively blending it with his/her individual self. Thus, we have two concepts of self that overlap and interact: a communal sense of self created in the practice and an individually constructed self.

The self created in the practice is a social construction shared between all carvers partaking in the practice. From this perspective, the selves expressed in the inscriptions are, to a large extent, a product of shared tacit knowledge, and the self is reproduced in the inscriptions as part of the practice. This perspective leaves us with the self as it appears in the practice, rather than the self as it appears in the agent's cognition. Understanding the practice as a distributed cognitive system, however, we see that the self created in the practice is essentially a cognitively constructed self shared between and created by all the participants in the practice. When the agent engages cognitively with the practice, s/he assigns the self in the practice to him-/herself. This self is a blend between the agent's sense of self before entering the practice and the self constructed within the practice. This cognitively constructed self is both communal – distributed across the participants in the practice – and individual. As every agent is different, they will all construct a sense of self in the practice that is individual to them and that may or may not differ from the other agents. Two agents in the same location can express a self that is much the same; this is ascribed to the fact that the agents' cognitive processes were situated in the same practice. Still, when partaking in the practice, the agent is free to add his or her own touch to the self s/he expresses, blending the self of the practice with other layers of self. Each new agent will also add a new tinge of color to the self constructed in the practice, leaving parts of his/her self for new carvers to connect with.

Through participation in the practice, the carvers blend their self with the sense of self constructed in the practice, and this enables the agents to relate to and become part of the group. By repeating the practice and assigning the selves created there to themselves, new agents also express a sense of belonging to the group. Therefore, the communal self is inevitably a social self, although it may also have other aspects.

In conclusion, we have two concepts of the self, the communal, formed by outer practices, and the individual, formed by inner cognitive stimuli. When I move on to the selves we find expressed in graffiti inscriptions, I will see them as a mediation of the two: it contains aspects of the practice in which it is constructed, and thereby the communally constructed self, but it will also be colored by the carver's individual sense of self, the sense of self that the carver brings with him/her into the practice. The main benefit of bringing together practice theory and cognitive theory in the present article is that it allows for an

understanding of the self expressed in inscriptions as a negotiation between the social practice and the carvers' individual cognition. By approaching two sets of inscriptions from different contexts with this understanding of the self, I will investigate how the interplay between practice and cognition is visible in the inscriptions. Furthermore, I will discuss how the selves expressed in the inscriptions are shaped by the carver's cognition and the practice of carving.

Before moving to the empirical discussions, however, it needs to be clarified that when discussing graffiti, the one prominent agent is the carver. In the following, I will therefore be referring to the carver's self, cognition, and practice, rather than the agent's.

Medieval Graffiti

The examples in this article will be taken from the corpora of runic inscriptions from Maeshowe (Fig. 1) and Nidaros Cathedral (Fig. 2). I do not give a general survey of the two corpora here,[8] but for readers unfamiliar with the corpora, I present them briefly. Both corpora are varied and complex, and the selection of inscriptions presented here is not intended to give a full overview of them.[9]

Maeshowe is a Neolithic chambered cairn on Mainland, Orkney, where a group of Norse-speaking people broke in and filled the walls with runic inscriptions around the mid-twelfth century. Some of the inscriptions tie the carvers to a pilgrimage or crusade to Jerusalem, and it is believed that most, if not all, of the inscriptions were carved in the 1150s, when *Orkneyinga saga* tells of crusaders staying in Orkney. In other words, the inscriptions are likely to have been carved during a relatively short time, and most of the carvers probably knew each other. The Maeshowe corpus is unique in many respects. There are few corpora of runic inscriptions where we have this amount of contextual information, and, moreover, most of the inscriptions are very well preserved. In addition, this is by far

8 For general discussions on the corpora, see Barnes (1994) on Maeshowe and *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer* (NIyR) vol. 5, Hagland (n.d.) and Syrett (2002) on Nidaros Cathedral. All inscription numbers are taken from these volumes: N + number refers to numbers in NIyR and Hagland (n.d.); Barnes/Syrett + numbers refer to numbers in Barnes (1994) and Syrett (2002), respectively. All transliterations and normalizations are based on these volumes; translations of inscriptions in Barnes (1994) are mainly based on that volume, while translations of the N inscriptions are done by me.

9 For more in-depth discussion on the selves expressed in these corpora, see Holmqvist (2019) for the inscriptions from Nidaros Cathedral and Holmqvist (forthcoming) for the Maeshowe inscriptions.

Fig. 1: Maeshowe is a Neolithic chambered cairn situated at Mainland, Orkney, which is filled with medieval runic graffiti. Photo by the author April 19, 2018.

the largest corpus of non-ecclesiastical runic graffiti. As such, it also gives us insight into a non-ecclesiastical medieval social setting.

The Nidaros Cathedral corpus, carved over a period of several hundred years, is not as unified as the Maeshowe corpus. It includes both runic and Roman alphabetic inscriptions that were carved over several hundred years. The oldest extant parts of the cathedral are from the twelfth century, and some inscriptions are likely to be almost as old as the walls they are carved on. The tradition of carving on the cathedral walls did not stop when the building process was completed, however; rather, it has continued to this day, making it difficult to separate the medieval from the post-medieval inscriptions.

In both corpora, we find several name inscriptions (i.e., inscriptions only consisting of one or more names) and agent inscriptions (typically following the formula 'X carved'). Not surprisingly, though, there are more graffiti inscriptions of an explicitly religious character in the Nidaros Cathedral corpus. The carvers did not randomly carve anything anywhere; the practice changes when the material surroundings change, moving from a church to a chambered cairn without ecclesiastical connections. Participants in the church carving practice often choose explicitly religious messages (e.g., 'pray for me'), while, in Maeshowe,

Fig. 2: Nidaros Cathedral is in Trondheim, Norway, and its walls are filled with both medieval and post-medieval graffiti inscriptions. Photo by the author October 15, 2016.

the carvers seem preoccupied with the mound itself and the treasures it might once have hidden. The Maeshowe carvers also carve inscriptions about sex and their own rune-carving skills. Both of these inscription types are known from other runic corpora as well (particularly the rune stick material), but they are less common in churches. Therefore, we see that while some types of graffiti (name and agent inscriptions) overlap and appear both in ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical environments, other types are either predominantly ecclesiastical or non-ecclesiastical.

Analysis of the Inscriptions

In accordance with the premises presented in the introduction, I treat graffiti carving as a practice in the following discussions. The practice, and thus also the contents and layout of the inscriptions, are determined by the physical surroundings (for instance, Maeshowe or a church), the available artifacts (such as

a knife or another pointed object), the body and cognition of the carver,[10] the routines that the carver has learned for carving runes, and the carver's tacit knowledge about and embodied understanding of inscriptions. Tacit knowledge, embodied understanding, and routines are picked up cognitively by the carvers when partaking in different practices. The bodily side of a practice may relate to movements, but also the physical possibilities and constraints provided by the carver's body. For instance, the carver's height will determine how high up s/he is able to carve. The carver also has an embodied understanding of how to move his/her body to carve the inscription. Cognitive activities include deciding what and where to carve. Such decisions are partly determined by the carver's tacit knowledge and by the routines he or she has learned. For instance, there are norms, manifest in the carver's tacit knowledge, for what to carve in different locations. Ultimately, though, the carver can choose how to relate to these norms and whether to follow them. Thus, the outcome of the carving process – the inscription itself and the self or selves it expresses – is a result of the mediation between the carver's cognition and the practice.

We can see the carvers in Maeshowe as active participants in a carving practice. It seems that the carvers knew each other and who had carved the inscriptions,[11] a fact indicating that many of the inscriptions were carved during a relatively short period. Together, the carvers develop a practice by reading and commenting upon each other's inscriptions, developing a joint understanding of what to carve in this enclosed setting. This is apparent in inscriptions 23–32 in Maeshowe, where the carvers together create a narrative about the mound itself and a treasure supposedly hidden there (Fig. 3)[12]:

10 Termed "body/mind" by Reckwitz (2002a; 2002b).

11 This is seen in inscription 8 in Maeshowe (1994, 93): . . . *er mér sagt at fé er hér folgit órit vel. Segja fáir sem Oddr Orkasonr sagði á rúnum þeim er hann reist.* ' . . . [adverb?] is told to me that treasure is hidden here well enough. Few say as Oddr Orkasonr said in those runes which he carved.' In this inscription, the present carver refers to an inscription by Oddr Orkasonr. However, there is no inscription in Maeshowe signed with this name. This indicates that it was well known among the rune-carving community in Maeshowe who carved the inscriptions, including the unsigned ones.

12 The inscriptions are ordered in the suggested order of carving, see Barnes (1994, 171–4). Barnes claims that the final four inscriptions could have been carved either before or after the other six inscriptions, but I think it most likely that they were carved after. If these inscriptions were the first to be carved on the stone, this would be an odd place to choose; the upper half of the stone has a more comfortable height for carving, at least given that the carvers were adults.

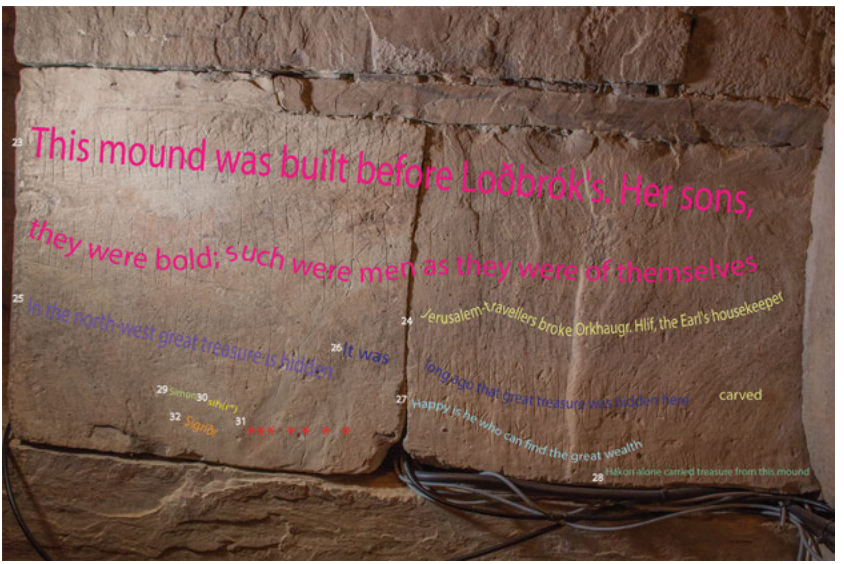

Fig. 3: Inscriptions nos. 23–32 in Maeshowe are located on two adjacent stones. In this figure, the translated inscription texts are given separate colors and are laid on top of their respective inscriptions to show how the inscriptions interact spatially and visually. The figure is made by the author.

Barnes 23 **sia · hǫuhr · uar · fyr · laþin: hæl͡tr · loþbrokar͡ · syner · hænar // þæiruǫro · huater · slituǫro · mæn · sæmþæiruǫrofyreser**
Sjá haugr var fyrr hlaðinn heldr Loðbrókar. Synir hennar, þeir váru hvatir; slíkt váru menn, sem þeir váru fyrir sér.
This mound was built before Loðbrók's. Her sons, they were bold; such were men, as they were of themselves [i.e., they were the sort of people you would really call men].[13]

Barnes 25 **utnorþr: erfe · folhit · mikit**
Útnorðr er fé folgit mikit.
In the northwest great treasure is hidden.

Barnes 28 **· ǫkǫnæinbar͡feyrǫuhiþisum**
Hákon einn bar fé ór haugi þessum.
Hákon alone carried treasure from this mound.

13 Bold typeface is a transliteration of the runes, italics give a normalization, and roman typeface gives the English translation. ͡ indicates that two runes are written together, as a ligature, // indicates a line break, parentheses indicates uncertain runes, – indicates an unidentified rune, : and · indicate separation marks.

Barnes 27 **sælersaerfinamaþanǫuþhinmikla**
Sæll er sá, er finna má þann auð hinn mikla.
Happy is he who can find the great wealth.

Barnes 26 **· þatuar͡lǫkoerheruarfefolhketmiket**
Þat var lǫngu, er hér var fé folgit mikit.
It was long ago that great treasure was hidden here.

Barnes 24 **iorsalafararbrutuorkǫuh · lifmtsæiliaiar͡ls // ræist**
Jórsalafarar brutu Orkhaug. Hlíf, matselja jarls, reist.
Jerusalem-travelers [i.e., crusaders] broke Orkhaugr. Hlíf, the Earl's housekeeper, carved.

Barnes 29 **simon**
Símon
Símon

Barnes 30 **sih(r-)**
(Sigríðr)
(Sigríðr)

Barnes 31 **(-----)**
...
...

Barnes 32 **sihriþ**
Sigríðr
Sigríðr

The ten inscriptions are found cramped together on two adjacent stones in Maeshowe, and their physical closeness to each other is the first indication that they relate to each other. Had one of the carvers not intended to relate his/her inscription to the other inscriptions, there would be several other locations in the mound where s/he would have had more space for carving. Furthermore, the carvers relate to each other thematically. We see how the first carver opens with a story about the supposed origins of the mound, tying it back to legendary times with the reference to Loðbrók.[14] The second inscription seemingly starts a different topic about a treasure hidden in the northwest, while the third inscription ties the

14 It seems here that Loðbrók is a woman, but the (Ragnarr) Loðbrók known from the sagas is a man. Whether the two Loðbróks are the same is a different discussion (see Barnes 1994, 184 for a brief summary and references to further discussion), but what seems clear in this inscription is that the Loðbrók referred to here lived long ago and had a legendary status.

first two together by suggesting that a treasure (the same?) was originally hidden in the mound. The two inscriptions following this one continue the treasure topic, while inscription no. 24, the last of the long inscriptions, seems to go back to the topic of the mound. How Hlíf, the carver of no. 24, relates to the other inscriptions is ambiguous. Does she suggest that their narrative is the wrong one and that the Jerusalem travelers rather than Hákon were the first to break into the mound? Or is she simply filling out the narrative about the mound? In any case, she is alone among the six carvers to sign her inscription, thus marking clearly her own contribution. This is by no means the only signed inscription in Maeshowe, but it stands out in this particular sub-practice, as the other five carvers seem more concerned with creating a joint narrative than with claiming their ownership to it.

In these inscriptions, we see how the carvers develop a practice. It is built on tacit knowledge of rune carving and of how to act in social and informal settings in general, while the carvers also feed the practice with new cognitive structures that subsequent carvers must adhere to if they want to participate. This can be understood as a distributed cognitive system that the carvers uphold and develop through their participation. Consequently, carvers determine what the practice is, and the practice determines what each carver will carve; each inscription is best understood when seen in relation to the others. The carver of no. 23, as the first of the ten inscriptions, establishes a practice for rune carving in this particular location. This practice is based on the carver's tacit knowledge of other rune carving practices, most prominent, perhaps, the rune carving practice found in the rest of Maeshowe. The other nine inscriptions repeat the practice established by the first carver, but with variations. The variation here is crucial, though, as it allows the carvers to express some individuality in how they relate to the topic. Note particularly inscription no. 27, which employs both rhymes and other poetic effects like a marked syntactic structure. The inscription does not add significant details to the narrative, though it adds fluency and a literary tone. The selves developed in this practice are implicit; by participating, the carvers state that they are interested in the topic of the inscriptions. They cognitively associate with a treasure-hunting and storytelling self through their participation. All the carvers might not have a personal interest in this, but to blend with this self is necessary to adhere to the practice and fit into the group. As such, one could also see the self developed in these inscriptions as a social self: through participation in the practice, the carvers establish themselves as members of the social group.

The final four inscriptions are single names or what appears to be attempts at carving names, and they could be completely unrelated to the rest of the group. However, given their placement, these inscriptions are most likely intended to be part of the same practice. There are indications that the carvers were less skilled in runes than their peers. This is seen in the shape of the runes

in these four names, which are less neatly cut than the runes in most of the other inscriptions. Sometimes, it is also hard to identify which rune the carver intended to carve. Moreover, one of the names, that of *Sigriðr*, is seemingly carved twice, of which one is more successful than the other. If my conclusion is right, the carvers of these names may not have been skillful enough to participate fully in the discourse, but by carving their names, they could at least mark their participation in the practice; they could, for instance, have participated orally. As such, these four inscriptions can also be read as markers of group identity.

Looking at inscriptions from Nidaros Cathedral, we see again how the practice changes according to context. Here, the carvers' self-expressions are blended with the cathedral, as is seen in N 478:

guþ · ok : hin : hiælgi : olafr : kongr (:) hialpe (:) þæim (:) mane (:) er : þesar : runar : ræist : meþr : sinu : hæilahu : arnaþar : orþe
Guð ok hinn helgi Ólafr konungr hjalpi þeim manni, er þessar rúnar reist með sínu heilagu árnaðarorði.
May God and the holy King Ólafr with their holy intercessions help the man who carved these runes.

The inscription was found on one of the outside walls of the octagon,[15] inside of which the shrine of St. Ólafr was located. The carver probably addressed his inscription to St. Ólafr as this was his resting place, and he chose a location as close to the saint as possible. When choosing the cathedral as the place to carve his message, the carver tells us that he trusts in God and believes that his prayers are more likely to be heard if carved onto God's own house and close to St. Ólafr's resting place. As stated earlier, our self is in our choices; by approaching and carving here, the carver takes part in the carving practices of the cathedral, thus blending his sense of self with the atmosphere of the cathedral. Turner (2014, 77–78) writes that the self is adaptable, and this is seen here. The self most visible in this inscription is a self oriented towards God; it is a blend between the carver and the cathedral carving practice he partakes in. However, he must also have had other identities. We can presume, for instance, that if this carver had entered Maeshowe and chosen to participate in the carving practice, he would be likely to blend his self with the practices there and express a self more in line with the inscriptions there. Thus, the diversity in the material is likely to attest to the carvers' adaptability to different practices rather than to diversity in the interests of the carvers.

15 Though it is now on display at the museum in the Archbishop's Palace.

Not all carvers in the cathedral display their religious identity as clearly as the one above. For instance, there are 15 clear and several uncertain examples of name inscriptions in the cathedral. Taken out of context, these could mean anything. Names appear in other contexts as well (e.g., on name tags and loose objects and in Maeshowe), and their meaning varies according to the practice they are carved in. I argue that the carvers, simply by partaking in the cathedral carving practice – which is ripe with other more explicitly religious inscriptions – express a religious identity. In the cathedral, the carver's self will be blended with the ecclesiastical environment. Moreover, when reading and interpreting an inscription in a cathedral, the reader is likely to interpret the inscription in light of its location and read it as part of the cathedral carving practice, thus creating a blend between the inscription and the other activities taking place in the cathedral. There are two examples from Nidaros Cathedral that imply that this is how at least some readers interpreted the inscriptions. These are N 493 (Fig. 4) and N 494, both found on the inside walls of the octagon. Here, there were originally two single names: *Ketill* and *Erlingr*, and later, both were expanded to prayers[16]:

(k)uþt͡aki͡sa͡lketi͡lls
Guð taki sál Ketils.
May God take Ketill's soul.

kuþkætiþinærlingrsikmuntarsonnuo͡kiafna͡n
Guð gæti þín, Erlingr Sigmundarsonr, nú ok jafnan.
May God protect you, Erlingr Sigmundr's son, now and forever.

Thus, we see here how two readers have interpreted the name inscriptions within the cathedral practice as requests for prayers and have decided to answer these requests by carving prayers for the names.[17] This also testifies to how people can interact through the inscriptions. Just like in Maeshowe, carving is a social phenomenon. By partaking in a church carving practice, the carver is not only blending his/her self with the cathedral, but also with the community of people belonging there. This argument can be extended to most of the inscriptions in the cathedral, though there are a few inscriptions that seemingly deviate completely from the practice, and thus where this argument

16 See NIyR, 5:56–57 for arguments why these inscriptions must have been carved in two stages.
17 See Holmqvist (2019) for further discussion of these inscriptions.

Fig. 4: "Guð taki sál Ketils." (May God take Ketill's soul.) The inscription was carved in two stages. First, Ketill's name was carved and given a frame. Later, someone added a prayer to the name. Photo by the author November 28, 2017.

is not valid. Here, the carvers cannot be said to express a religious or social self through their inscriptions.[18]

In the examples above, we see how the carvers relate cognitively both to their physical surroundings, i.e., the cathedral or the mound and other inscriptions found in the vicinity, and enter into a dialogue with these surroundings through the inscriptions s/he carves. Through the inscriptions, carvers cognitively associate or dissociate themselves with the practices surrounding them, thus defining themselves as either inside or outside of the group. Moreover, the practices also influence what other selves the carvers choose to express. For instance, many carvers in the cathedral explicitly express a religious self. This will define them as part of the group as they conform to the norms for church inscriptions. However, the fact that carvers choose to carve in a church at all tells us that they saw themselves as persons devoted to God or the Church. There are seemingly no similar connotations connected to Maeshowe, so here, the practice is also more open and flexible,

18 An example is Syrett 9, a slanderous inscription insinuating that one of the church authorities was gay.

but it is nevertheless clear that norms were established through the practices that the carvers developed, and that most carvers chose to follow these norms. Thus, we see a social self emerging, although a social self choosing actively to be social by cognitively associating itself with the group.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I will turn back to the two research questions presented initially:

1) How is the interplay between practice and cognition visible in the inscriptions?
2) How are the selves expressed in the inscriptions shaped by the carvers' cognition and the practice of carving?

The questions meet in the two concepts of self presented above: the communally constructed self created in the practice and the individually constructed self created in each carver's cognition. The two are interrelated and will color each other, but we still see traces of both in the inscriptions cited in the discussions. In Maeshowe, we see how the practice requires the construction of a narrative, though the way in which the carvers contribute to this narrative is highly individual. While one adds a dreamy and poetic inscription about finding the treasure, others provide flesh to the story by stating facts like who took the treasure and where it is hidden. Likewise, in Nidaros Cathedral, many inscriptions relate to the ecclesiastical setting in which they were carved, while their approach to this setting varies greatly. In the cited inscriptions, we find carvers carving their name, carvers requesting intercession for themselves, and carvers praying for others. Looking at the entire cathedral material, one would discover even more diversity, including inscriptions which seemingly deviate from the predominant practice. Even so, the cathedral context invites less diversity than Maeshowe, indicating that although both contexts allow for diversity in expression and some degree of cognitive exploration, the carving practices in the cathedral seem to be more restrictive. Thus, the selves expressed in the Maeshowe inscriptions are also more diverse, allowing greater room for the individually constructed selves. In the end, what each carver chooses to carve is probably dependent upon the situation s/he was in at the moment of carving. A young woman eager to be accepted by her peers, a father grieving the loss of his son, and a carver desperate for forgiveness for the sin she once committed would be likely to carve very different inscriptions. Although the carvers very rarely tell us about such circumstances, we should assume that some of the variation we see can be ascribed to the carvers' personal situations.

In this article, I have shown how medieval graffiti can be understood as the result of a cognitive process situated in a practice, resulting in the insight that inscriptions are always created in a mediation between the carver's cognition and the practice in which the carver is situated. Social requirements are weighted against the carvers' wishes to express themselves, though in some contexts, the social requirements are more restrictive and regulating than in others. This perspective can be useful when studying several aspects of the carving process and the situation in which the inscriptions were carved, but here I have focused on what the perspective can contribute when studying the self. The combination of cognitive theory and practice theory shows us how the self is both social and personal – created both cognitively and in the practice, and always in a relation to other selves.

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The Self in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia, and Beyond: Between the Material, the Social, and the Cognitive

Abstract: In this article, the editors summarize how the different starting points for studying the self in the articles of this book, lead to different conclusions with regard to the nature of the self and the distribution of agency: cultural / social / practice theorists give priority to the context, the discourse, the practice when defining the self, while cognitive theorists give agency to various human agents behind cultural expressions. Based on this synthesis of the articles' approaches and results, the article, and the book as a whole, conclude that every given expression or conceptualization of the self is certainly conditioned by its specific historical and socio-cultural context. However, the emergence of the self in itself appears as a constant cognitive process of traveling and unfolding, wayfinding and choice-making, that happens continuously in all historical and social contexts and in all individuals, known and unknown.

Keywords: agency, cultural theory, social theory, practice theory, cognitive theory, blending theory, choosing / choice-making, wayfinding

"A discussion of what we are . . . calls upon a philosophical orientation, an ability to loosen the categories, juggle the frames, and be free enough to question even those ideas one has held most dear." (Hustvedt 2010, 27) The desire to loosen the categories and to juggle the frames has been a main motivation for the present book as a whole. Once we have done that, the desire emerges to collect the treads, or at least attempt to, which is the goal of this concluding article. The two main narratives in this article will therefore concern the two main goals of the book, as accounted for in the introduction: (1) the variety of parameters that emerge as significant for the self, when the self is studied from various theoretical perspectives and approaches; and (2) the dynamics between the self and the multitude of social spaces in Viking and medieval Scandinavia,

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c. 800–1500, as conditioned by type of materiality, genre, language, and discourse of medieval sources.

Theoretical Starting Points: Agency and Parameters of the Self

In this book, the authors have used a variety of theoretical starting points and approaches that lead to various definitions of the self, as well as identification of different parameters that are significant when discussing the self.[1]

The authors who engage actively with cognitive theory (Eriksen and Turner, Steen, Eriksen, Holmqvist) define the self as primarily the minds behind various cultural expressions, or the literary characters, with their thoughts, intentions, emotions, that are represented in a cultural expression. These include:

- Patrons, as kings, religious leaders, and aristocrats who commission or create their own literary portraits (Steen);
- Writers, poets, and translators behind Old Norse literature and poetry, copyists who created new versions of various texts (Eriksen and Turner; Eriksen), or rune-carvers expressing aspects of themselves in various contexts (Holmqvist);
- Readers of medieval manuscripts who could find their own meaning in the texts they were reading or listening to (Eriksen);
- Literary characters who act within narratives (Eriksen and Turner).

The authors who engage in discussions inspired by cultural or practice theory (Shaw, Bandlien, Torfi H. Tulinius, Naumann, Croix, Bonde, Holmqvist) emphasize the self differently, and define it more broadly. Agency is given to:

- The creating or created self, but always conditioned by the cultural context and norms (Bandlien, Torfi H. Tulinius);
- The community in which the self participates, for example the kin, the congregation, and the community (Torfi H. Tulinius, Bonde);
- The practices themselves that individuals engage with through their minds and bodies, such as consuming and sharing meals, weaving, participating in Mass, or rune carving (Naumann, Croix, Bonde, Holmqvist);

1 Detailed descriptions of the articles are given in the introductory chapter of the book.

Table 1: Variety of possible agents, as defined by various theoretical approaches, as discussed in the book's articles.

Agency is given to:	Cognitive theory	Cultural / Practice theory	Focus on empirical material	Eclectic theory
Patrons, kings, religious leaders	X		X	X
Writers, poets, scribes / rune carvers	X		X	X
Readers / users	X		X	X
The community and its social norms		X	X	X
Practices and rituals		X	X	X
Physical surrounding		X	X	X

– The physical surroundings that give space and boundaries to human existences and practices, such as buildings, urban spaces, churches, and ancient monuments (Croix, Bonde, Holmqvist).

A few of the authors engage in close readings of various empirical material, and the way they relate to theory is indirect and implicit, by references to such discussions as Morris on individuality (Rønning Norby), or by using terms such as 'agency' (Diesen, Johansson), or by describing processes through which an individual asserts himself publicly (Bauer). These authors project agency onto:

– Poets, writers, scribes of literary expression, as well as the communities within which they create (Johansson, Diesen);
– Creators of new practices, such as the agents behind secular and religious laws (Rønning Nordby);
– The physical space of a medieval town, or phenomena such as fires or the Black Death that give boundaries to human existences and practices (Bauer).

Two of the articles – the first (Shaw) and the last (Holmqvist) – are intentionally eclectic and acknowledge a combination of these agencies. As Holmqvist concludes, any activity the self engages in may be seen as a representation of a social practice. Every individual act, however, is an active cognitive choice, made at a specific moment and place. The variety of possible agents, as defined by the various theoretical approaches, is summarized in the table below.

Even though this table greatly simplifies the discussions in the book's articles, as it aims to highlight the difference in focus,[2] it visualizes two things very well. First of all, the main difference between the theoretical groups are not what parameters are related to the self, but rather the degree of agency given to the various agents. According to the scholars inspired by cognitive sciences, only cognitive selves produce meaning and have agency. Communities, practices, rituals, surroundings may have agency too but only if agency and a specific independent meaning is projected onto them by cognitive selves. In cultural / practice theory, the dynamics between animated / unanimated entities is the opposite, and primacy of agency is given to the social groups, their norms, practices, rituals, and surroundings. Interestingly, the scholars who perform close readings of their sources with only implicit theoretical influence define the self in more or less the same way, sometimes giving primacy of agency to cognitive creatures like patrons, poets, and creators, and other times to the cultures within which they create. Last but not least, those having an eclectic approach combine all these factors deliberately and consciously balance between the importance of both cognition and context.

The Self and Social Spaces in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia, *c.* 800–1500

A second aim for the book was to investigate whether the selves in Viking and medieval Scandinavia, *c.* 800–1500, emerged in a different way in this context if compared to the selves in medieval Europe. We remember that various authors argued for various symptoms or motivators of the emergence of the self in medieval Europe. Some argued that the Gregorian reform, for example, and its introduction of confession rituals was a huge instigator for the emergence of the medieval self, while others argued that the main reason was the clash between secular and priestly power, which pressured individuals to turn inwards, to engage in self-understanding and self-expression. In order to choose, individuals had to reflect, to examine their own desires, motivations, goals. As argued by Verderber (2013), it is the need to choose that demands of the self that it exist between the inside and several outsides. Similarly, Shaw's eclectic article on traveling selves in medieval England also demonstrates how the self

2 Cognitive scientists certainly acknowledge that the self is social, distributed and embodied, and cultural / practice theorists similarly acknowledge that individuals have minds, own thoughts, emotions, and desires.

always endures despite constant new experiences. Shaw discusses familiarity and comfort during travel, as opposed to the process of alienation that may be triggered by the travel. Traveling necessitates performing, it necessitates active attitude in relation to the people and things on the way; the traveling self is thus "frequently emergent, just not constant" (Shaw, this volume, p. 36).

The argument for seeking a potential difference between the European and Scandinavian context was that Scandinavia became Christianized much later, which may have led to a different realization of such processes. On the other hand, the universality and pan-European character of the Catholic church is an argument for the opposite: the Gregorian reform, and any schism between secular and priestly power that came with it, was valid for the whole of Europe, including Scandinavia.

Many of the articles in the book demonstrate that it is indeed the need to choose that pressures, inspires, or allows the birth of agency. This necessity comes, however, from different conflicting situations. In some of the articles, it was the conflict between pagan and Christian norms in the decades prior to and following the political introduction of Christianity around year 1000 that inspired self-expression (see, for example, Johansson and Torfi H. Tulinius). Other times, it was the civil war and contest for the crown that was at the core of the inspirational conflict that pressured the emergence of the self (Steen and Bandlien). Yet other times, the trigger was the Icelanders' aspirations to preserve a sense of independence, after their submission to the Norwegian king in 1262/64 (Torfi H. Tulinius).

The conflicts occurred on other occasions on a personal level: King Sverrir, trying not only to stay alive but also to become a king (Bandlien); a person finding himself in a legal conflict because he owes taxes to the Church and needing to convince the prosecutors of his true intentions (Rønning Nordby); a person choosing his/her meals (Naumann); a person needing to rebuild his house after a fire in medieval Oslo and to claim his "old" space back (Bauer); a person searching to save his soul through attending church and participating in the Mass (Bonde); or a person trying to make sense of a saga (Eriksen).

Such social and personal conflicts that pressure the emergence of the self may be referred to as "folds," to use Verderber's term, or as "travels," to refer to Shaw's study. On numerous occasions, the socio-political and personal "folds" or "bumps on the road" would have overlapped or existed in parallel in the mind of a person. This is well demonstrated, for example, by Holmqvist, who discusses an individual's personal expression of thoughts and feelings through runic inscriptions in a grave mound in Orkney, while on the way to the ultimate goal for a Christian soul, Jerusalem. "Traveling" was perhaps an occasion for "folds" to appear, and "folds" triggered "traveling." It is in this process that the self emerges, while actively

traveling and unfolding the folds. As Steen (this volume, p. 71) points out, the self is a verb rather than a noun, a function rather than an essence.

The book as a whole does not therefore anchor the emergence of the self to a specific point of time or cultural context, nor does it demonstrate a chronological development of the self. What the book shows, however, is that it is perhaps more sensible to trace the chronological development of the socio-political "folds" in a given cultural context. Once again, these socio-political folds would have occurred simultaneously with personal "folds," which together would have pressured the individual to make choices. Presenting the emergence of the self in this way – through the "folds" it needs to unfold and the "travels" it needs to engage with – has a striking similarity to what Turner refers to as wayfinding: selves are choosers and choosers are wayfinders:

> At each point along the way, the person may be flexibly different from the preceding self, and flexibly inhabiting a different story, a story that is a modification of the one the person originally inhabited. The possibility space of these alternative selves is large; it includes a range of on-deck alternatives; but one self precipitates in the instant when the choice must actually happen. (Eriksen and Turner, this volume, p. 55)

This takes us to the follow-up question, which concerns whether in the material investigated, the self's agency and cognition come prior to expression, and whether agency and cognition may be seen as independent of texts, discourses, languages, and social structures, or vice versa. What we have seen is that the different parameters of the self, if at all separable from each other – cognitive, material, and social – are interrelated; some theories and scholars give priority to one, while others give priority to another. However, the observations in the previous paragraph – that the self emerges through its choices in all the possible and often simultaneous "folds," through a constant process of traveling and wayfinding – seem to indicate that the self is at least not dependent on a specific mode of expression. The expression may indeed vary with regard to language, discourse, genre, and materiality, and thus be historical, but the choice needs to be made no matter which of these modalities is available and used to communicate the choice.

From Viking and Medieval Scandinavia Back to Modernity

This new insight from the studies of selves in Viking and medieval Scandinavia, *c*. 800–1500, also has implications for the continuation of the current discussion

of the self in medieval Europe and not least modernity. If the main conclusion stated above is accepted – that the self emerges constantly in the choices necessitated by personal and social "folds" – the book as a whole, even including the studies inspired by cultural / practice theory, actually suggests that a similar situation may be valid for medieval Europe (as demonstrated by Shaw), as well as for modern contexts. Cognitive scientists would of course not be surprised by this, as from a cognitive perspective, medieval and modern cognition is the same, as our cognitive faculties and abilities have not changed over the past 50,000 years and do not change depending on cultural context. Cognitive abilities and needs are indeed realized differently in different cultures, but the cognitive premises for culture, stories, selves, and choices are the same.

This conclusion is interesting for historians of culture, literature, art, or material culture, i.e., for humanities scholars. For most of us, cultural peculiarity, similarities and differences, change and development are often at the center of our scholarly attention. What this book demonstrates, however, is that cultural change may also be seen as cognitive stability and variation. It is a variation in the cultural realization of the same stable cognitive potential or needs. As suggested by Eriksen and Turner: "Even when using the basic set of (mental) tools, one may build a different house." Changing the focus from development / change / emergence / fall of culture, to variation in culture, emphasizes not only that humans may, and have, responded to their cognitive needs in an endless amount of cultural ways, but also that the creation of culture, or stories in itself, is the core cognitive ability of the self. And as mentioned already: stories work together to provide concepts of selves over causation, agency, time, and space. Humans compress and decompress the concept of self, through blending, analogies, and disanologies. This may lead to a continuity or break in the sense of self and culture, but mostly it is a demonstration of the basic human cognitive ability for creativity and cultural diversity.

This leads to a last observation based on the studies in the book: it is true that medieval, and for that matter, all history is written by the winners, by individuals and selves in powerful or privileged positions, which allows for their voices to be heard. However, we can and need to discuss the selves not only of these known writers, poets, kings, or bishops, who have left behind prominent cultural traces like texts, manuscripts, buildings, and art, but also, we need to be conscious of and remember the selves of the anonymous book-maker, manuscript-illuminator, clothing or sail-weaver, and house builder, who constantly made choices in the same social and similar personal folds, as the other known and named selves. No matter how collective and normative a culture is, any individual has the cognitive ability to choose, and individuals chose all the time, even if they chose to adapt and be a part of the crowd. Both cognitive studies

and the studies of medieval sources in this book confirm that the self's core is in the constant process of choice-making and wayfinding. This changes the premises for how we can approach the self, both medieval and modern.

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